

BESIDE THE PEARLY WATER

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TO

C. J. B. WEBB

Dear Father-in-law

BESIDE THE PEARLY WATER

First Day: Morning

FROM the air, the Firth of Clyde looked like a limitless sheet of pale cooling jam, rippling thickly, silkily, when the wind struck it, just as the surface of a still-warm preserve does when the pan is tilted.

Julia Lanier had been looking down from a height of four thousand feet at the slowly-floating shadows of the clouds, and trying to think what image the surface recalled; and now, having brought this domestic one into her conscious mind, she turned herself slightly towards her secretary, who sat beside her. Miss Hatton rightly took this to mean that very soon the aeroplane would begin to descend towards their host's private airstrip, but her conclusion was not accompanied by any shuffling together of the newspapers and propaganda-pamphlets which they had been studying, for she had quietly done this while Julia was looking down at the steamer that plied twice daily between the mainland and the island which was their destination; lying tinily, not seeming to move, under its haze of smoke. Now, Miss Hatton's chief aim was to keep from her answering smile any hint of that love which Julia (who aroused devotion in women as easily as she aroused desire in men) found irritating.

Miss Hatton, who was well-dressed as only an American woman of forty-seven can be, had been watching the thought-shadows passing over her employer's face even as the cloud-shadows passed over the water below, and, having

intuitions bestowed upon her by love which were not indigenous to her nature, had suspected the existence within Julia's head of uncommonplace thoughts. But she had not suspected the jam: the jam was completely beyond the circumference of her imagination: and that was only one of the reasons why Julia's value to the world as a personality was (to assess the two women numerically) some thousand times greater than that of Miss Hatton.

The young man, one of Sir James Robertson's two secretaries, who was acting as air-host on this short flight from the mainland of Scotland to the island, glanced at his wrist.

'Five minutes,' he said, with the smile that he had learned not to make too human while keeping warmly charming.

Miss Hatton smiled back (she was secretary to someone more famous than Sir James, and therefore more skilled at smile-manufacturing) and looked interestedly down at the island, over whose narrow green shore, and black peaks soaring out of the mist, they were now passing, but Julia said nothing; did not even turn her head. She had learned in six years to hoard each drop of her nervous energy as if it had been uranium, and now this lowering of a curtain of inattention between herself and the world whenever possible had become second nature.

At the airport on the mainland, earlier in the day, there had been two welcoming deputations. One had consisted of important municipal officials, with gold chains and fur trimmed scarlet robes, a speech of welcome, and a stout and far from nervous child to hand Julia some flowers. *But Miss Lanier was not in Scotland officially*, Miss Hatton had explained to the shopkeepers and business men upon whose broad, red, sensible faces a smile, beginning as masculine patronage and ending in wonder at Julia Lanier, had been varnished. *She was here for a few days rest, and would be staying on the island at the home of Sir James Robertson and Miss Robertson. No, she*

would do no official visiting in Scotland; no factories nor day-nurseries (here Miss Hatton's mind had slightly contracted as if it had been brought too near great heat, as always when she thought of Julia and children). Oh no (to the reporters who were quieter, less overwhelming, than those at home) not tired. But even Miss Lanier (with a smile which, while not a parody of her employer's, was equally brilliant) likes a holiday sometimes, you know.

This had been received with hearty smiles that were almost affectionate, and the broad faces had turned towards Julia (who had not spoken) with deference. Then there had been a pause. Before it could become awkward, the other deputation had pushed forward out of the silent, watching crowd that must have been five thousand strong.

This one was led by a gaunt man, wearing that shabby raincoat now irrevocably associated in everybody's mind (thought Miss Hatton) with back-alley shootings and political gangsterism. And they had chosen a good photogenic type, too. How sad he looks, she thought, as if all the sins of Capitalism were on those thin shoulders. But do they take Julia for a fool?

The people following the trench-coated one were decent housewives, youngish and hatless and quiet, some wild-haired students wearing knotted mufflers and tam-o-shanters, a girl in slacks whose carefully dirty neck and hair emphasized the breeding shown in profile and skin, and a group of short, square men whose good-nature smiles seemed to protest that they were not the ogres they were everywhere proclaimed to be.

The gaunt leader spoke a few simple words of welcome, to which Julia replied with silence and a smile the counterpart of that already given to the municipal deputation; and then another little girl, this time an anæmic baby angel of the slums, crept forward with another bunch of flowers, so

loosely bound together that they trembled in the wind. They were the bluebells of Scotland, and very fragile and helpless and noble they looked beside the fat bouquet already presented, making it appear ostentatious, which was the object of the exercise.

Julia, not looking at the child, took the bluebells in one hand; gloveless, brown, noticeably long and slender, with bitten unpainted nails; and cradled them on the other side from the opulent bunch. The wind blew warmly and gulls wheeled overhead in the lilac-grey sky, and suddenly on all sides the hooters began to sound for eight o'clock; out of the corner of one great eye Julia saw an aeroplane coming down which must belong to Sir James.

But the crowd was agitated; it was heaving and murmuring, and suddenly, in front of them, out of it there marched a small old man in poor clothes with a confident smile on his face. He marched over the grass right up to Julia and stood there, his eyes seeking hers in eager waiting. The first deputation waited too, glancing from him to Julia and back again, and so did the second one, and the staring, silent crowd.

Julia looked at him consideringly, and then her face began to reflect the conspiratorial, happy look on his own as if in a mirror. But damn it, what *was* the dear old fool's name?

It was no use. The second passed, and out of the corner of her eye, again, she saw their aeroplane make landfall, and the smile on the old man's face began to fade. She turned to Miss Hatton but for once Harrie was no help to her. So she leant forward, and put her arm heartily about his shoulders, and set upon his bristly cheek one of the full, childish kisses for which she was famed throughout the world. The crowd sighed, and some enthusiast began to clap. But no one took it up.

'I know your face. Lovely to see you again. But I don't remember your name,' Julia said.

She did not quite hear the gratified answer, which had something to do with America and a hospital in 1948. She turned away and walked towards their aeroplane, which had taxied along the runway until it was close to them. But then, before she turned, she paused and meditatively looked them all over: the first deputation and the second one, the two children, the old man now standing at attention and looking slightly absurd, and the silent watching crowd. Her large dark brown eyes, beautifully shaped under heavy brown lids and natural eyebrows, wandered from face to face with an unconscious and aweing difference from the norm in their depths.

Was there anyone or anything here that could serve as a particular illustration of a general situation? suggest an anecdote to be acted by Julia's hands and eyes upon a million TV screens after she arrived back Home? anything that could help peace?

There was no one, and there was nothing. She turned away, and in a few moments they were seated in Sir James Robertson's aeroplane; in a few more they were airborne.

The two deputations, composed of people who described themselves as very busy, stood with tilted heads watching the aeroplane out of sight. They had all been born in this town, and politics had been the lifelong passion of them all, and many of them cherished local enmities even dearer to them than politics, yet on every face lingered the same expression of faint, bewildered pleasure. As they walked off into the grey morning to get on with the work of the day, politics seemed, for once, unimportant. Poetry (the invisible and unnamed, because unknown) element had just touched the airport grass with a gleaming sandal and flash! had gone; and the only thing they could compare it with was a visit from a film star, and somehow it had not been like that at all.

Now the aeroplane had left behind the large village of whitewashed houses which was the island's chief port, and was flying north-east; and the curious formation of the coast was clearly visible to Miss Hatton, who was still brightly pretending interest. There was first the softly-lapping sea (was it always this pearly colour, and so gentle?) and then a line of red rocks, followed by a wavering one of bright green reeds and bog plants. Then came the winding coast road. Then another belt of green, darker and marshy, and at last the grey slopes of the mountains, cleft here and there by the colour of the glens. Over all arched the tender grey sky, broken through by wandering gleams of sun. The mainland and the pointed bulk of the Holy Isle were of the same misty indigo blue.

Now they were flying above a long steep glen that ended on the open shores of a sea loch, and the young secretary was pointing downwards at a white house set on the water's edge.

'Glen Rosa.'

'Wonderful position,' smiled and nodded Miss Hatton, and felt a sudden homesickness for New York. Mountains, lakes, wonderful positions—how tired she was of them all.

Now they could see the airstrip behind the house, and now they were sinking towards it. Julia stirred, and put down the flowers she had been holding, and Miss Hatton picked them up. They could be given to someone—put in water—forgotten. Many things, if Julia and she were lucky, could be forgotten during the next three days, which were supposed to be sixty hours of rest passed under the roof of an old friend, a friend whom Julia had met in America in the old days. Julia was now herself old enough, impossible though the thoughts might seem, to have old days.

• Three minutes more, and they were standing on the grass again, looking about them. Noise had stopped (it was always surprising, thought Miss Hatton, that you forgot how hellish

noise was until it had stopped) and they could hear the sea, very softly, as if it were dozing. The air was soft too, and growing steadily warmer.

'What's that scent?' she demanded of the secretary, who was helping the pilot to get out their luggage.

'Bog myrtle,' said Julia, turning quickly; and then they saw a girl coming leisurely, out of the shrubbery hiding the back of the house, towards them. She had red hair, and wore a jersey and tweeds and four strings of pearls, and to Miss Hatton's gaze, fascinated by dislike, the dogs capering round her seemed to number about twelve.

'Here is Miss Robertson,' said the secretary (was there a note of relief in the pleasant Cambridge voice?) but the pilot, whose voice was not Cambridge, looked up and waved with condescending arrogance to the slowly approaching girl, and she waved back. Julia never went forward to meet anyone, unless they were someone Royal, and she now stood still, waiting, with her face turned towards the girl and the house. Miss Hatton wondered if she were thinking about the last time that she had stayed there; it had been seven years ago and her second husband had been with her. Then she saw that a manservant had followed Miss Robertson out of the shrubbery; he was evidently going to take their cases.

'Hullo, Julia. I don't expect you'll recognize me. It's seven years ago—I was ten. I'm Catherine.'

Though Miss Robertson's leisurely advance had not expressed welcome, her tone did. It gushed from her thin lips, and her freckled face wore a broad smile. She had greenish eyes, and her light red silken hair, brushed smooth and worn slightly curling at the tips, was her only beauty, but she wore her clothes so well that Julia's, crumpled from travelling, seemed even more than usual not to belong to her, and not to matter.

'We used to go wading together,' Julia took the outstretched hand for a second.

'How lovely of you to remember. It's lovely to see you again, too.' She half-turned towards the aeroplane, where the pilot was loitering, then gave her full attention once more to Julia. 'I've never forgotten you, you know. Ever since you began doing your absolutely marvellous work I've been collecting photographs of you, and cuttings of your speeches from the newspapers. I've got two books absolutely full——'

'This is my secretary, Miss Hatton,' Julia's low voice cut across the flow of words and Catherine smiled sweetly, darting a keen look at Miss Hatton through the dazzle of her eyes and teeth.

'Come in, and have a drink. (Douglas, take the cases upstairs; you know which rooms.)' She began to lead the way back to the house, with the dogs tripping and trotting about her. 'I'm afraid Daddy's out fishing.' (She was not looking at Julia.) 'Well, not afraid, really, because he went out on purpose; he thought you'd rather have a quiet time, without anyone bothering you, so he's warned everybody off for this afternoon. Some people are coming in this evening for cocktails but you won't mind that, will you?'

She turned and said something consoling to the dogs, who had halted like a wistful but well-trained army at the entrance to the house.

Julia was looking at the house, and did not answer.

It could not be said that her manners were bad; they conveyed no impression of self-absorption, and they completely lacked pose, but they were not gracious. She did not make the person to whom she was talking feel that they were for the moment her only interest; her eyes and her expression were usually neither warm nor interested, and people said that, whatever she was, she was not a saint,

because saints always breathe out love. Her concentrated, star-like personality alienated many people by its difference from the usual; even her silences, not vacant but seeming to glow, were suspect. *It's her unselfconsciousness*, a disappointed man had once said of her, *she really is like a flower or a star—and bloody uncomfortable it is, too.* Yet when the starlight was focused upon someone—when the flower looked at you, and the cloud smiled—the effect was proportionately overwhelming.

Johnnie was here with me seven years ago, she thought now as she looked at the house, and a feeling brushed her heart like the memory of great pain. Yet, during those years, she had not thought about the place.

Catherine, having shown her guests into two lofty white rooms looking out over the sea, went downstairs into another of the same kind, with the same view, and crossed over to the little bar in one corner. The young secretary was sitting by the open window.

'Peter . . . what will you have?'

'Gin and water, please. I say, why didn't you tell me she was like that?'

He could still so vividly see Julia's little head, on which the large curls of dark red-brown hair clustered like a Victorian boy's, and her belted grey dress, and her eyes, that Catherine and the room seemed scarcely real beside the memory.

'Why should I?'

'I should have thought you'd have mentioned it. One doesn't usually know someone like that and keep quiet about it.'

'I wasn't keeping quiet. I haven't seen her since I was ten and, if you want to know, I'd forgotten what it's like having her around.'

'You don't like her?'

'I hate her.' Catherine steadily poured a little water into her glass.

'Come, come, Miss Robertson!'

'Don't you want to know why?' She came over to the window and sat down facing him, cradling her glass in one hand. The long pale blue curtain drifted gently inwards and sank again.

'Not particularly, thank you. I share Maurice's phobia about disinterring old bones.'

'Who said it was old bones?'

'It must be some sort of a skeleton. You said you hadn't seen her for seven years, so you must have been brooding over whatever-it-is since you were in pigtails.'

'Yes, I have.' She pressed her lips together in a way that made her look older, and carefully put her glass down at her feet. He laughed suddenly.

'What's amusing you?'

'Douglas. He never took his eyes off her. I thought he was going to fall over with the cases more than once; he wasn't paying the least attention to where he was going.'

'Did Ronnie look at her like that?' sharply.

'That sulky little ex-Brylcream? How should I know?' He stood up, carefully inspected a cuff, and buttoned his jacket. 'You aren't very cagey about your feelings in that direction, are you? One should be more discreet.'

She was quiet, looking at the floor.

'Well, I am off. Thanks for the liquor.'

'Won't you be here to-night?' looking up.

'No. The afternoon boat, and back to London. Shan't be here again—so far as I know—until the Friday after next. Maurice will be up on Tuesday . . . that will be nicer for you, wyon't it?'

'It certainly will.'

She watched him as he crossed the room. At the door he

turned and lifted his hand and she unsmilingly raised her own in return. She disliked his cleverness, his invulnerability, his cool inspection and rejection of herself, but he was only six years older than she, and everyone else in the house was so very much older; even Ronnie Dugdale, the pilot, was thirty-one. In spite of disliking Peter, and knowing that he disliked her, there was comfort in his being so near her own age, and she needed comfort of some sort.

Miss Hatton was just coming down the stairs, refreshed by a shower and wearing a wild silk dress of strawberry pink, and Peter stopped on his way to say something graceful and helpful to her.

'What a ravishing dress,' Catherine said brightly as she came into the room. 'What will you have? Does Julia still hate clothes?'

'An Old-Fashioned, please. I wouldn't say that she hated them. She never thinks about them; she hasn't the time.'

Miss Hatton settled herself into her chair and took a cautious look round. The house had had its inside taken out in the late 'twenties, when Sir James had bought the estate and the mansion that went with it, and a few large rooms had been made out of many small ones. Then most of the inside and outside had been painted white: there had been photographs in the newspapers at the time of the Engineering Millionaire's White Summer Palace on Island. Catherine's mother, divorced by her father four years ago, had added a little colour to the rooms, but Miss Hatton thought that nevertheless the general effect resembled the inside of a lighthouse, and it made her feel queasy.

Then she looked at Catherine. It was clear to her that Catherine did not like Julia. Perhaps it was no more than a plain girl's jealousy of a beautiful mature woman, and probably Julia would not notice it, but she must nevertheless be protected from it. Julia had borne enough.

'She misses a lot of fun.' Catherine brought the Old-Fashioned across and set it carefully on the broad arm of Miss Hatton's chair.

Miss Hatton resisted a pointed glance at Catherine's tweed suit, which was anything but fun.

'Oh . . . I don't know,' she said vaguely, and lifted her glass and sipped. 'Most people,' she went on, setting it down again, 'think the way she dresses is affectation, the first time they meet her. But when they've been with her for a while they simply forget to notice her clothes.'

'Yes. I suppose they do,' Catherine said, after a pause.

She looked a little sick, as if the realization of Julia's immense fame had suddenly burst over her, and then and there Miss Hatton began to have her first suspicions that these three days were not going to be as restful as she had hoped.

She reflected with satisfaction that before coming downstairs she had given Julia's one beautiful dress to the maid to be pressed. It had been a present from herself, and when asked just now where it was, Julia had replied without interest that it was somewhere around, but she had glanced at Harrie and smiled as she spoke, and Harrie had been so glad, because Julia must be feeling—not 'better', because one never got the impression that she was suffering—but calmed by the beauty of the island perhaps, and by the soft washing of the sea.

And if she were calmed, that rare state was not going to be disturbed by a jealous little girl. Daughter, sister, mother—all these was Julia to Miss Hatton, and although usually she did not have to protect her from anything worse than cranks and beggars and bores and the Press, this looked like being an occasion when real watchdoggery might be necessary. She thought, with mild amusement, of the fact that she had even thought it necessary, after one of Julia's broadcasts which had brought threats, to arm herself.

Catherine suddenly threw what remained of her drink out of the window.

'I don't really like it,' she said shortly, answering Miss Hatton's inquiring glance. 'I'm going to have a coke,' and she got up and went over to the bar.

The abrupt movement, and the note in her voice, made her seem younger again, and Miss Hatton found herself pitying her, which she did not want to do. It must be dull for her here, in this isolated house used by her father for a month in the summer, with a houseful of temporary servants and that superior secretary boy and the hard old man himself for sole company. No wonder that she made passes at the pilot or was willing to let him make them at her.

Catherine was leaning against the bar and sucking the coke through its straw, an attitude not in keeping with her quietly correct clothes, and Miss Hatton, leaning back relaxed in her chair, amused herself for a few minutes in re-dressing her in imagination as an American of seventeen would be dressed.

'Is Julia coming down to lunch?' A green eye, sparkling with such malice that it actually startled her, was glinting round the pale straw in the sunburnt hand.

'She didn't say she wasn't,' Miss Hatton's tone was surprised.

'What does she drink?' Catherine put down the coke bottle and began to fidget among syphons and glasses.

'Nothing, this morning, I expect. Right now she isn't drinking.'

'On the wagon?'

The tone was childishly insolent, childishly aggressive, bringing the jealousy and dislike right out into the open, and Miss Hatton had to brace herself, and think, before she answered.

'Nothing so dramatic. Sometimes she kind-of forgets to

drink, that's all.' It was a lame and even a slightly absurd answer but it vaguely expressed what she meant and she could not think of a better.

'Why?' Now the tone was loud and bold, and Catherine was facing her. 'Why does she do that sort of thing—"forget" to drink, not dress like other people? What's the *point*? To make herself interesting? I've always wondered, ever since I was old enough to think about her. At school they were always talking about her. There were people who would rather talk about Julia than their dogs or horses (funny taste, some people have). Girls collected photographs of her and cut her speeches out of the papers——'

'You can't call Julia's talks 'speeches', it sounds so pompous——' Miss Hatton was mistress of herself now, with all her love and her skill alert to protect Julia. But her voice, light and adult, was drowned by Catherine's.

'I had a sort of second-hand prestige just because I used to go wading with her when I was ten . . . as if I'd been with Churchill or Stalin or somebody—but of course even *we* didn't believe half what they say about her in the papers—how she gives away all she earns to war victims all over the world, never mind whether they're enemies or not, and wearing her clothes until they're so old they drop to pieces, and all that *rot*.' (The word came out coarse and broad, like a vulgar noise.) 'That's just a publicity stunt, of course. We all knew that.'

'All those stories are true.' Miss Hatton got up and came over to the bar. 'May I have another, please?'

'Yes. Yes, of course. I'm sorry,' Catherine took her glass and began to fill it, but her hands shook and her eyes were unseeing and she went on at once:

'I used to get thoroughly browned off, I can tell you, with being asked questions about Julia—did it really all start in Canada, her career, I mean——'

'Don't call it a 'career', as if she were some film star——'

'Well, what else is it? It is a career, it's public work, it's all for other people, isn't it? But she makes enough money and publicity out of it—and they used to ask me if it was true she was found lying praying and being sick in the road when those people were blown up in Canada——'

'It's true, yes.'

'Oh, she has got a religion, then? I thought——' Something seemed for the first time to have checked the furious eloquence. 'Daddy always said her religion was just Humanity.'

Miss Hatton's face assumed a dry expression. The roots of a conscience nourished in Connecticut still lingered under her worldly appearance and manner. She did not like doctrinal vagueness, and she did not admire Emerson. She needed a simple doctrine firmly allied with practical duties, though it was many, many, years since she had confessed to the first.

'Julia's a lapsed Roman Catholic,' she said, and awaited the renewed outburst.

But it did not come. The girl turned away to get some ice, and when she faced her once more, with the filled glass, Miss Hatton saw that she had gone pale.

'I thought Catholics were so down on divorce?' she said.

'The Catholic Church is; some Catholics aren't. But what's that got to do with Julia?'

'She's been divorced twice.'

'Do get your facts right.' (Miss Hatton nearly said 'child'.) 'Julia has divorced two husbands; that's very different.'

'I suppose they let *her* divorce *them*, because they—she—, because men get so—they can't seem to keep *sane* about Julia.'

'Oh no, they didn't. Neither was the self-sacrificing type.'

Catherine looked at her, with an expression too tragic for her young face to carry convincingly, and Miss Hatton found it impossible to take all this seriously. Irritation was mixed with her pity. And yet, if there were to be scenes and sulks from their young hostess throughout the week-end, it would be serious.

'What's all this about?' she asked suddenly. 'Won't you tell me?'

It was plain that this was what Catherine wanted. Her face sprang to life.

'I suppose you know that my father wanted to marry her, five years ago?'

So that was it. That explained everything.

'A good many men have had the same idea.' Miss Hatton made this sound like a tart retort, for she was determined not to let the situation slide any further down the slopes of emotion.

'It was while he was still married to my mother.' Catherine's voice had gone up. She was staring at Miss Hatton accusingly.

Miss Hatton nodded, and waited. She was listening for Julia's long light step along the corridor outside. They must get this scene over before she came in, whatever went unsaid.

'He kept on telephoning and cabling to Julia in America, as soon as he knew her divorce was through, begging her to have him. It was *disgusting*. Everybody knew what he was doing—all our friends over there, and in London—he went completely to pieces. I've never cared two hoots about him since.'

Then it isn't jealousy, Miss Hatton thought; at least, not of the straightforward kind.

'And that's what started everything. Things had been fairly all right up till then. But Mother was so angry—he'd been so awful to her about Julia—that from that time things got worse and worse, until she left him.'

Miss Hatton walked slowly away, across the long empty room, until she came to the window where the blue curtain floated. There she paused, and looked out to sea. It was difficult to keep the sadness out of her parched but skilfully-painted face, for that New Englander's thirst for righteousness, which lingered unquenched in what remained of her soul after twenty-five years of servitude among the important and the rich, was mourning again: Misery, misery, misery; wherever you went, whatever old stories you tripped over, you always barked your shins on misery. And if I left Julia, she thought, and retired to the Green Mountains and read my Bible and tried to do my duty, do you suppose I would be any happier? Do you? And besides, my duty is here, in this world of nation-wide hookups, and lights that never go out, and endless noise; with Julia: protecting Julia.

She turned round. Julia was coming into the room, looking like a little girl who has washed and brushed herself for luncheon, and smiling at them.

'Let's go wading this afternoon, Catherine?' she said.

'All right. Lovely. Nothing for you? Sure? We can be out until half-past four, but after that Daddy'll want us. Some people are coming in for drinks.' Again her eyes were glinting with malice, and then Miss Hatton realized that the scene which they had just been through had only explained why Catherine hated Julia. It had not given any hint about what Catherine meant to do to Julia in revenge. And yet she was certain, seeing that glitter a second time, that a revenge was planned.

Something spiteful, she was thinking as they took their

seats at the luncheon table; something an angry child would think up. She can't mean to push her over a cliff or drown her; she wouldn't dare. It will be something petty: something to do with clothes, or make-up, or perhaps the people who are coming in for drinks this evening—damn their eyes. Miss Hatton began on her lunch, relieved that the situation was at least clearer than it had been an hour ago, and determined to be more on guard over Julia than usual.

But Catherine's arrangements had been planned around the hope that Julia would be struck by lightning, an element harmonious with her nature.

First Day: Afternoon

THE water was so clear; its clearness flowed again and again over Julia's senses until her brain, burdncd with plans and thoughts and phrases, slowly began to feel itself growing clear; as if the burden were sluicing away to open sea and leaving behind it coolness and quiet.

The boat glided slowly round the shores of the sea-loch under strokes from the powerful arms of a big Scotsman in jersey and tam-o-shanter, while she and Catherine waded after it, sometimes calling to him to pause, so that they could safely bestow in it a wreath of feathery orange seaweed or a mussel shell of unusual size; but more often putting them into a little old canvas bag Julia carried slung over her shoulder. He fished while they loitered, darting glances now and then at Julia, which Catherine saw with bitterness.

Julia wore an old skirt belted up to her knees, and a jersey that might have belonged to a beggared sailor; her feet, of surpassing beauty, gleamed on the sand below the water.

The tide began to flow in again after an hour or so, and they climbed into the boat and Angus slowly rowed them round the point to where the red rocks and green rushes began, and on Julia's orders brought the boat in to shore.

They landed, and said good-bye to him, and he pushed off and rowed away, smiling shyly at Julia under his shaggy brows.

She goes down well with servants, thought Catherine.

She had dreaded the afternoon, but it had not been as bad as she had expected. This wading through the low tide and clambering over the rocks with Julia was something that they had done together almost every afternoon in the summer of ten years ago, before Julia had become famous, and it had been surprisingly easy to slip once more into the childish actions; even Catherine's hatred had not lasted all the time. But that part of her nature which remained a child's was passing very rapidly, and her pleasure in the feel of the water, and the finding of shells and weed, was spoiled by her contempt for such a mild pastime, and for Julia's silent pleasure. And every now and again hatred swept over her, bitter as the sea water but not so clear, not so unconfused.

'Do you want to have tea here or climb up to the glen? It's four o'clock; we've got half an hour to eat, and then it's half an hour's walk back to the house, and then it'll be time to change for these people. Unless you'd rather I 'phoned them from the village to send the Morris down for us? . . . that would give us another twenty minutes.'

Julia had sat down on a rock, and was looking into the matted yet delicate carpet of dark green bog plants covering these fringes of the shore. She did not glance up while Catherine was speaking, but gradually the peace faded from her face, and her usual expression of controlled and care-worn awareness returned. Catherine saw this with pleasure;

she knew that Julia always hated it if people mapped out her time. She knew so much about Julia. She remembered everything that her father had ever said in his revolting ecstasies, every detail bitterly dissected by her mother in those long, feverish talks.

'Let's stay here,' Julia said, and Catherine sat down at some distance away and slipped from her shoulder another little canvas bag, twin to the one carried by Julia but containing a thermos flask of tea, home-baked bread, and a pot of farm butter and some shelled shrimps.

There was one thing with Julia: you did not have to talk, a thing which Catherine hardly ever wanted to do; and as they ate and drank in silence she could think about the dogs or Ronnie, and sometimes, with a shiver of excitement, about her revenge to-night. There would a frightful row afterwards, of course. Her father would fall into one of those rages in which his body shook like an angry ape's; when the fury which always slumbered uneasily in his nature awoke, and clambered outside him, all over his swollen face, bellowing throatily through his voice.

But it would be worth it. He could only take the dogs away from her (he would not have them shot, because people would talk) and send her back to that hell of a school. He would not be likely to sack Ronnie, because he did not know what was going on there.

She weighed all the risks and rewards as coolly as a young commander, as she sat drinking tea and staring at the ocean, now pale blue under the cloud-clear sky, and she decided that, whatever happened afterwards to herself, what her revenge would do to Julia would be worth it.

Julia was absolutely certain to get a most awful shock. She had this thing about atomic warfare, and it was a kind of complex, and everybody knew about it, but the Press kept it dark because it made her sound as if she were mad. But



(Catherine looked sideways at the silent figure on the rock, motionless except for the slight movement of her mouth as she ate) and . . . she had begun by thinking, reluctantly, that at least Julia did not look mad . . . but the thought had wavered and died off, because the sight of Julia seated silent on a rock, eating, put her back into the past.

Suddenly she was ten again, and loving Julia so much; more (but now she quickly pushed away the thought) than her own mother; happy to be with Julia and to find Julia's hand always there when the rock was unexpectedly slippery or the pool deeper than it had looked. We used to have good times, she thought, before the tears of self-pity stung her eyes and she was back in the present.

She stood up and crushed the greased paper in her hand and tossed it into the sea. Julia turned and smiled at her. It was good to be here, beside the pearly water once more, with Catherine. It was . . . not *like* going back ten years . . . it *was* going back ten years . . . swimming easily, miraculously, against the awful forward sweep of Time instead of struggling exhaustingly to keep a little ahead of it. She looked at Catherine, and thought that she would like to have talked to her; to ask her what she was 'going to do'; to say something interesting about the ever-changing but persisting court of dogs which had accompanied her everywhere since she was six; try, even, to comfort her a little about the loss of her mother. But Julia must not use her love for individuals. She must not be like other women, who 'loved people'. Each drop of her energy must be hoarded, and then poured out unsparingly on all of the human race and on serving peace; the spirit whose wings had never yet, since history began, steadied their rippling golden shadow over all the world. Love spent on individuals, energy spent on individuals, would rob peace.

'It's late—we'll have to hurry; it's time to go,' Catherine

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said, bringing in the words because she knew that they would disturb the calm which had returned to Julia's face.

But it was not easy to hurry Julia, and their pace as they picked their way over the rocks to the road was slow. The lingering summer evening of Scotland had hardly begun, but already the softening light had changed the whiteness of the cottages facing the sea and touched the abundant foliage of the lowland beeches with yellow. They went down the village street, passing one or two visitors out for a stroll and a few black sheep wandering companionably up to the open doorways; and outside the dwarf Post Office the ladies dressed like Catherine in tweeds and pearls looked amiably, but with a little surprise at Julia's coverings. Catherine thought that they recognized her, but the fine Scottish manners prevailed over human curiosity, and no one actually stared.

The road was lonely after they had left the village, and they became more aware of swarthy Goatfell and its attendant peaks soaring behind the barrier of green which half concealed the glen. Catherine walked quickly, and always a little ahead of Julia (a habit liable to rouse the mildest walker to protest) but Julia walked silently with her graceful gait, apparently unnoticing. Catherine was now becoming concerned lest the car should overtake them on the road, but it was all right; the danger passed; they met no one but a cyclist and two more strollers, and they got to the house just before twenty minutes to six. Julia smiled at Catherine and went directly up to her room.

Catherine stood in the hall with the floor painted white and scratched by the nailed boots of many summers, listening. The house was quiet except for faint ordinary sounds in the distance. It felt as it always did; holidayish, flimsy, temporary; in spite of its solid structure and scanty but luxurious furniture. She saw her father's fishing cap flung

down at an irritable angle beside his tall boots through the open door of a small room used to store such gear, and guessed that his day had not been good. The creel with its disappointing catch would have been taken carefully to the kitchen, and Maggie would cook the fish for dinner to-night. All day Sir James had stayed away, leaving his house empty for Julia so that she could come into it and find there what calmness she could, and now (his daughter knew) he was upstairs with his new valet, with his long straight mouth looking its grimmest; and because he had sacrificed to Julia, for a whole day, his longing to see her, he would now be expecting something from her in return. She must be 'kind' to him. But Julia was never 'kind' or 'sweet'. Catherine, who hated her, knew that. Her father, who was supposed to love Julia so much that he could not hide his passion, did not know what Julia was.

The thought took Catherine by surprise. She was still standing there, staring through the open front door at the dogs lying about on the lawns, when Miss Hatton came briskly down the stairs. Catherine came to life, and turned as briskly to meet her.

'Hullo . . . have you had a nice rest?'

It sounded insufferably cosy, and not at all compatible with Miss Hatton's silver poodle-cut and garnet taffetas, but she answered composedly:

'Yes, thank you. I did catch up on my sleep, too.'

'I love your dress.'

Miss Hatton was tired of hearing her wardrobe approved by Catherine, and she pretended not to hear as the girl stood aside to let her pass into the living-room.

Curtains had been drawn to shut out the evening sea and a fire had been lit in the large grate of pink brick, and lights shone softly along the walls and over the bar. Tall vases held beautifully arranged sunflowers and roses. The room looked

terribly sad. Someone might be lying in state round here, thought Miss Hatton.

'I must go up and change,' Catherine said, and then did not go, but lingered by the door, glancing round. Miss Hatton looked at her. She was flushed and her eyes were bright; the malicious expression had settled into them now, like a snake into its hole, and was looking out triumphantly. But she is on hot bricks, thought Miss Hatton, taking a cigarette from her case. Something is cooking, and how I wish I knew what it was.

'I must fly—do help yourself to what you want—if anyone comes, be an angel and look after them, I shan't be ten minutes,' said Catherine, and, with that always surprising quickness of early youth, was gone.

Miss Hatton sat down by the fraudulent fire, whose flames might have been made of orange glass for all the heat they threw out, and tried to 'toast her toes', wishing that she were some place else. Presently a trace of comfort stole into her mood: she painstakingly traced it to its source, and again found herself remembering Julia's dress designed by Christian Dior, which she had left lying with some matching roses on Julia's bed.

First Day: Evening

KEITH GAVIN turned at the beginning of the glen, where its walls began to draw in, to watch the motor-yacht which had brought him to the island making off across the sea. The water was a pale shimmering blue under a sky of the same colour, and towards the setting sun, mildly declining into folds of gold and grey, it became gradually yellow.

The mainland was dark blue, the mountains black, the white tufts of bog cotton beginning to glimmer amidst the dark green herbage of the glen. Shadows were already gathering there, beyond the last light of the sun. Keith arranged his rucksack more conveniently and walked on.

He knew this way well, for he had taken it many times since he and his wife had first come to stay with the Robertsons eight years ago, and he always enjoyed coming back to it. First there was the lonely road running along by the sea; then the rough, green, broken opening that led up into the glen, where the cold brown burn splashed down; then the bridge, and a pause to marvel at the clearness of the water. The scent of bog myrtle always came at this point, especially at evening, when the air was cooling. The long narrow path came next; the almost overgrown path from which to stray incautiously meant an exhausting wandering and splashing in marshy undergrowth haunted by sweet smells. Once he had almost trodden on an adder there. Then came boulders of grey granite, rising steeply while the sea dropped away below; then fifteen minutes that were all too short along a delightful ridge a handspan wide, with a green glen five hundred feet below on one side and a grey glen five hundred feet below on the other.

Then more boulders, climbing up to a cairn that hid the prospect lying ahead; and finally the easy swing down into the next glen, ending in the sea-loch with the white house built upon its very shore.

This evening he enjoyed each stage of the familiar journey, but not as he had done in the past. A little of the pleasure had gone out of it. He supposed that it was because he was growing old; then, too, he had last been here with his wife, who had left him nearly a year ago for another man. Keith now acknowledged to himself that he had never loved her as, in his youth, he had wanted to love a woman and known

that he could love one; but there was much hurt pride to be suffered, and he remembered the sweetness of their early years together; she was fifteen years younger than he.

They had trodden this path many times together, and the memory saddened him. No one can break the close ties of twelve years without bewilderment and pain, though during their last unhappy months together he had come to think that never, even in the first years, had he known what she was and what she needed. The man for whom she had left him was younger, and less serious in temperament, than he, and bewilderment at her choice had mingled with Keith's grief. Vera, Vera. He repeated her name inwardly, and it was that of a stranger.

Yet he did not wish that she would return to him. He supposed that a man in his position should be lonely, but he was not aware of loneliness. He had his work and he had his son, and a man of fifty, unless he is a fool, is not perpetually thinking about happiness.

Keith Gavin was a beautiful man of Scotland; tall and gaunt of frame, with prominent features and eyes of clear dark grey and the full, controlled underlip which means that its owner has imposed a severer line there than Nature intended. He was strong of will and gentle of heart, the alliance irresistible to most women. More than one had loved him without his knowing it. His name was known and venerated wherever men did his kind of work, for he was solidly, impressively clever in his own line; gifted with memory, judgment and analytical faculty in the way that can be one form of genius, although in the contemporary world that word has grown to mean a quality dazzling and erratic and strange.

He had been staying with his father on a short holiday at the old home on the mainland when Catherine Robertson's telephoned invitation for the week-end had reached him;

and as he had not seen the Robertsons for some time; and as Catherine had promised not to let the Lanier woman harangue him about Peace; and as, if he did not go, it really would be rather a waste of the opportunity to see the fabled Julia at close quarters, he had laughed and accepted.

He knew the famed face only in photographs, but he did (searching his memory as he walked swiftly downhill) remember a small dark head, usually hatless, set upon a long throat. Because he disliked television, he had never seen her talking, but he had heard her voice once on the air, and the tones, which still carried a trace of the Deep South where she had been born, had seemed to him (he now remembered) faintly affected.

Now he could see the cars drawn up outside Sir James's house. There were ten or twelve, it must be a party. Keith was not pleased, but neither was he dismayed; he was not unsociable, and one could not expect to stay with the Robertsons and meet no one, and these people must have driven over from neighbouring houses and hotels to see Julia Lanier, just as, in a way, he himself had. But if they expected to see him in a white tie they would be disappointed, for he had with him no more than a bag of needments and the grey suit he was wearing.

He passed through the low white gate and over the lawns, now yellow in the dusk, and on to the house. The door stood open, and the wide white hall looked twice its real size in the cool glow of concealed lighting. A servant took Keith's rucksack upstairs, and he, having shaken his head at the suggestion that he might like to see his room, went straight into the long living room, where some thirty people were standing close together and uttering a shrill chattering hum unlike any other sound in the world. He saw the heavy shoulders and lewd, hard face of Sir James Robertson standing well

above his guests, and he recognized the light red hair of Catherine.

Afterwards, there was little time to remember precisely what he had thought, and how he had felt, because he and she had so much to say, and to be, to one another, in so few hours. But he did tell her that, when he first caught sight of Julia's head and neck, and recognized it at once from his memory of the photographs, she was standing quite still, and closely surrounded by talking people: and that he had an astounded feeling that she ought to have been alone the first time that he saw her in the flesh; in the beautiful, dark, weary flesh she had worn over her spirit for thirty-seven years.

He began to move towards her, thinking of nothing but that he must get close to her as quickly as possible, and then he felt a strong irritation, because the people between them were so stupidly resistant to his advance. A kind of surprised, amused ripple began to accompany him as people made way for him, and in a moment Catherine felt it, and turned to see what was its cause.

She saw Keith, and her eyes blazed with excitement and relief. Everything but Julia Lanier was unimportant and even vague to him at that moment, but Catherine's change of expression was so marked that he felt an instant's surprise. She came diving towards him, round and between the groups of people, crying:

'Keith! There you are! What happened? Didn't you see the car?'

She got to his side and stood there, looking up at him and breathing so quickly that she almost panted.

'Was it there? I'm sorry, I didn't go to Broderick at all. Some people I know were cruising in the Firth and brought me across in their launch. I came over the glen.'

'Macdonald came back saying that you weren't on the

boat and I was having kittens.' She put her hand on his sleeve, smiling now. 'I'll get you a drink . . . what will you have? Daddy will be awfully glad to see you, he wants cheering up, he's in one of his filthy moods because he's had a bad day's fishing, and besides——'

She broke off. She was trying to lead him towards the bar while she was talking, but all the time her head was turning towards that part of the room where the crowd was densest around that other dark head, holding itself so still, yet unrigidly, amidst the jerking shoulders and animated faces. From his place, yearning towards her, drawn as if by a strong cord, Keith could see how the eyes of the talkers continually slid round to her while they chattered, although every face wore a serious expression because Peace was serious and, internationally speaking, things were in a serious state. There were hard, red, aristocratic faces, and broad, cunning, business ones; there were girls with jewelled caps above their small blue eyes; old women whose words, uttered in loud voices, were perfectly articulated; more tweeds and pearls (real wool and real jewels); the old Lord of the Island in his famous ancient suit woven by crofters in the far North forty years since; and a few of Sir James Robertson's brilliant young men from the plant on the mainland, with whom he liked to keep in personal touch so that they could learn, and be trained in, his methods.

'I don't want anything, thank you, Catherine, except to meet Julia Lanier,' Keith said in answer to her question.

He did not care what the child thought, and hardly realized what he had said. It was like suddenly being very thirsty when nothing but water would do. She made him think again of the burn water, reddish-dark and running clear in the sunset, that he had seen an hour ago.

'Truly? You really like the look of her?' Catherine turned quickly towards Julia, then back again, and her face was red

with delight; he thought that she must have a hero worship for Julia. But he only smiled and nodded.

'Come on, then!' Laughing silently, she began to make her way across the room. 'You shall have her.'

The disagreeable ring of the last words was lost on him almost as soon as he felt it. He did not see Sir James catch sight of him and wave to catch his attention. His breathing had quickened, and the speed of his heart. *Let her like me*, he was thinking over and over again, *let her like me*.

Now he could see her dress, which was the pale yellow colour of the last light on the sea, and standing away from her shoulders in curving petals. He saw the pale crimson of her carved mouth, and the wings of her childish eyebrows; but when at last she put her hand in his, he felt that it was slim and hard like the hand of a young girl but he could no longer see her face. *Mine eyes dazzle . . .*

'Julia,' Catherine was saying in an excited, girlish voice, 'this is a very old friend of Daddy's and mine, and he says he doesn't want *anything* except to meet you!'

Keith heard indulgent laughter, and then the deep voice of his host, which always sounded as if it were half-angry: 'I don't want anything else, either,' followed by more laughter.

Julia had smiled, and their hands had parted. Keith looked at her, and then at her eyes; and then into them. Sir James was asking him about his journey, and he was answering, but he continued to look into Julia's eyes, and she, without a trace of amusement or inquiry on her face, looked back into his.

He did not know that it was seven years since the rays of the starlight had focused in this particular way upon another human being. He was still blinded by the stroke of the lightning. But Sir James had seen, and could not conceal his jealous anguish, and Miss Hatton, standing amidst a group of

admirers in her usual rôle of being, not the rose, but near the rose, saw it with astonishment and foreboding.

'Who's that man standing with *her*?' asked someone in the group surrounding Miss Hatton, 'the very tall one, who's just arrived?'

'He looks like the knight in armour rescuing the lady 'mit nodings on' bound to a tree, in that Victorian picture.'

'Oh, I know the one you mean. We had it in Mummy's room. Yes, he does,' said a young woman.

'I always feel that picture ought to be called 'Out of the Frying Pan', murmured one of Sir James's trainees, but the words were lost.

Keith stayed in the group gathered about Julia, and when it changed from time to time, he did not move away.

The crowd began to lessen towards eight o'clock, and cars could be heard starting up outside, and voices calling thanks and farewells. Catherine hurried between living-room and hall, seeing people off, waving and shaking hands. Once, when a group had just left and she was alone for a moment, her father came almost noiselessly out into the hall and took hold of her arm with his shaking hand.

'What the hell do you mean by asking Keith?' His face was flushed with suffering and he spoke almost in a whisper.

'I thought you'd be pleased,' Catherine said innocently. 'You always like to see him, and you told me I could ask who I wanted to.'

'I don't want other men staying here when Julia's here. You're not a child any longer; you understand these things now.'

'I understood them when I was a child. You made me.'

'Can't you get rid of him early?' he asked, brushing aside everything, spoken and unspoken, in his misery.

'How can I? He's staying till Monday.'

Sir James swore. He looked his low birth in that moment; in his face, there were the Glasgow slums out of which he had steadily raised himself, building, as he went, the mighty engineering firm which bore his name.

'I thought you knew he was staying,' she said, drinking in his fury, 'I say, he and Julia *have* fallen for each other, haven't they? People are talking about it. It's awfully amusing. I shouldn't have thought Julia would be so easy.'

'You get rid of him; make some excuse,' was all that he said, threateningly, as he turned away, but his voice was confused and weary, as it often was now after one of his fits of rage.

Some more guests came through, and they had to say good-bye to them, and when they returned to the drawing-room, they found it empty but for Miss Hatton.

'Where's Julia?' demanded Sir James.

'In the garden,' Miss Hatton said pleasantly, and they all looked, as a cool air breathed through the room, towards the windows. The curtains were drawn back from one of them, and it was open. The sill was just low enough for a woman to step over it with the help of a man standing outside.

In any other house, with any other family, there would have been embarrassment. Here, there was none. The passions of two of those present were too strong to allow convention any weight, and Miss Hatton was so accustomed to finding herself in unusual situations that she never wasted energy, which might be badly needed later, in trying to smooth over their lesser peculiarities. In her years as a private secretary she had learned that the serene manner of a nurse, imposed upon the detached one of a nun, usually produced the best and most calming results.

Not always, however.

'But dinner's near on the table; the bell'll sound in five minutes!' her host burst out, while Catherine's face, as she

stared at the open window, was a-ripple with wicked, surprised delight.

'Isn't Julia coming in to dinner?' Sir James took a step towards the window, also staring, but angrily and longingly.

'She didn't say she wasn't,' Miss Hatton said; too soothingly, she feared a moment later.

'Wull!' The word came out in broad, hard-drawn Scots, as sounds that were equally betraying sometimes came from the lips of Catherine. 'I'll be —— if I'd take this from anyone but Julia, I'll be —— if I wud.'

Miss Hatton looked at the clock, and, murmuring to Catherine that she would just go and freshen up before dinner, went out of the room. She was so concerned for Julia, and so anxious that something good for her should come out of this situation, that, but for a faint sensation of distaste, she forgot her host and his slum-words almost before she had shut the door.

Could this be Catherine's revenge—this bringing together of two who had, at first sight, fallen beneath a Tristan-spell for one another? How wickedly pleased she had looked, but surprised, too, as if her plan (if it were her plan) had succeeded better than she had expected. And how could that creature, uncomfortably and unbecomingly poised between girlhood and womanhood, possibly have guessed that the two would contain such treasures of attraction for one another? It was like a bit of black witchery.

In spite of the happiness on both faces as Julia and Keith had stepped out through the window, Miss Hatton was very uneasy. Could there be another part of Catherine's plan; something that had not yet happened, but which the extraordinary tension between Julia and this man, that was even now (Miss Hatton glanced out of her window at the darkening gardens) deepening and rooting itself, would make even more successful? More . . . devastating?

A thing like this, that was in another form a commonplace in the lives of men and women, had not once happened to Julia during the five years that Miss Hatton had worked for her. She knew, as no one else could, how chaste and dedicated was Julia's life. Even the contemporary world (chewing upon sex and fear as once the medieval world brooded upon God and death) did not accuse Julia of unchastity, although there were people more fortunate than herself, who shook their heads over her two marriages.

Yet . . . where Julia was, there was violence. She seemed the calmest of women, but her tranquillity was like the cloud that hides the lightning, and Miss Hatton knew it; Julia longed for peace as only the passionate can.

Miss Hatton put the thought away. She had never before taken this knowledge out from her secret mind, and looked at it. She had always looked past it, at Julia's gentleness and her goodness. Now, gazing out of the window at a star rising over the pale sea, she wished on the star that what Julia had found this evening might be love. Miss Hatton believed that love did exist, although she had never met it, except among the very young; in gleams and moods and brief devotions that had died for lack of nourishment.

She let the curtains fall upon the star and the sea, and turned back to her dressing-table.

First Day: Evening. (continued)

'ARE you cold?'

She shook her head.

'Because, if you are, you must have my coat.'

'I am hardly ever cold. I don't notice weather.'

She had told him something about herself, using twice in one sentence the 'I' which she used so rarely. It was because she wanted to give him something of herself; only a little, at first, because she had grown out of the habit of giving herself in this way, but wanting to give with a confidence that he wanted to take what she timidly offered. He could not know that she had ceased for many years to speak of her own feelings and tastes and habits, but he did feel that a door was being slowly opened for him alone, and this increased the beauty of their first hour together.

They had walked away from the house across the grass, and made towards the thick groves of laurel and rhododendron at the garden's further end. Here, where the dimmest of yellow light lingered on the unstirring leaves, and scents in the air seemed faintly to prophesy autumn, they began to pace up and down on a path whose outline they could hardly see. Except when he had taken her hands to help her through the window, he had not touched her. Presently she laughed, almost silently.

'What is it?' bending eagerly towards her.

'Your name. What is it? I didn't hear it.'

He told her, and she said:

'You are quite Scottish, then—your father and your mother too?'

'Yes, and as far back as we can trace we are Highlanders. I was born in Edinburgh, about fifty years ago. Where in America were you born? I know how old you are; I have just remembered.'

'No, you don't really know how old I am; no one knows—how old I feel, that is. I was born in a little town called Lanier, in Georgia. It was named after Sydney Lanier the poet, who was our ancestor. Everything in Lanier stays the same for ever, and when I go back there I can still see and hear and smell the things I had there when I was a child.'

'Tell me about them.' As he spoke, a bell sounded distantly from the house.

'There's dinner,' murmured Julia, 'we don't have to go in, do we?'

Keith shook his head. At another time he might have thought that Sir James's insistence upon having a bell rung to round up his guests for meals, rather than relying upon an announcement by a servant, was an accurate pointer to Sir James's character, but at that moment Julia took his hand; not passively slipping her own within it, but catching at it, and holding it warm and fast like a friend, and his breath had gone.

Hand in hand they followed the path until it reached the bluff and then he went first, lightly pulling her up after him through the crowding leaves, until they came out on to a pale yellow field newly stripped of hay, which caught and held all that was left of the western light. The surrounding trees and shrubs were of a rich colour neither black nor yellow nor green, and behind them the mountains looked soft and dark against the afterglow. But the sea spread below was pale, almost to the mainland, and so calm that the larger stars threw along it faint streaks of fire. Nothing moved at all but some cattle cropping grass in the next field. The air smelled of hay.

Keith spread his jacket in front of a stone wall facing the sea, and made her sit down.

'Now tell me.' He took her hand again and sat beside her, watching her face.

'I want to tell you, but it is difficult to begin, because it is so long since I talked to anyone as I am talking to you.' She was silent for a while, with the face that held the quality of a legend, and was not calm, but only controlled, turned to the faint sea light.

'When I was sixteen I loved excitement and danger. We

were the first family in the town, and my two sisters and my brother and I were the leaders of the young people there; they all came to my father's house to dance, and shoot at the targets, and make love, and ride his horses. We had'—she turned to him, smiling—'the *best* time! I used to ride horse-back or drive my car all day and then dance all night until dawn. In the season, my father used to take a house in the nearest city for six weeks and sometimes I went to three—four—five parties in a night. I was so happy. I seemed made of happiness. My parents loved us, and were proud of our looks, and there was all the money in the world. Life was a delightful dream that we took for granted.'

She turned to him suddenly.

'This is like lifting a huge load from my shoulders. But I ought not to be telling you, you know. Don't you believe——' she felt for his other hand and clasped it, 'that we must keep our misery to ourselves? Although our hearts crack? When we speak of our wretchedness we create it again in a new shape. It leaves our hearts, but it joins the fearful load of wretchedness in the world and all about us.' She sighed quiveringly. 'So—I ought not to tell you.'

'Julia.' He spoke her name as if it were a spell. 'I can carry your load for you. And so far you have told me nothing wretched.'

'No, but our happiness did not last for long, and later on my life became terrible . . . no, that's an exaggeration—terrible things don't happen to individuals, they only happen to nations. Individuals are not important, not important at all.'

She stopped, and, gently withdrawing her hands from his, put them over her forehead as if to calm herself. He could see her eyes, shining between her fingers and reflecting the moon now slowly lifting itself out of grey and gold clouds. She took her hands away, and looked at him.

'Only, to-night, I cannot feel that. For seven years I have cared nothing for individuals, but to-night, when you looked at me, all that—it all went away.' Down came the heavy lids, and her wet eyes were hidden.

He drew her into his arms, and she turned her cheek until it lay upon his heart, and was quiet for some time. She did not apologize, nor dry her eyes, nor smile and make little jokes as any other woman would have done, but turned herself to him like a child. Yet he felt that he clasped a sorceress, and a legend, and almost he feared to touch her.

'When I was seventeen, I was married to a man years older than myself,' she began again presently, 'and it was a terrible mistake, that marriage. He was madly jealous, and so possessive that he destroyed my happiness and my youth. My daughter was still-born because of a quarrel between us while she was actually being born; I shrieked at him, between the pains. I was so miserable, you see.'

She lifted her head and looked into Keith's eyes.

'Dearest'—the sweetness of it almost stopped his heart—'it has all gone. I am not like that any more.'

He murmured something lovingly.

'So I went to my parents in great misery, and they arranged a dispensation for me (we are Roman Catholics, you know) and I divorced my husband on grounds of cruelty. Then I went back to the old life. I did all the things that I used to do, but more violently than ever. I was happy again, but in a different way. I enjoyed so greedily; I ate pleasure as if it had been fruit. I could not endure anyone, or any situation, that was miserable; it made me feel too much, and I ran away from such things. I would never be serious. I hurt my parents and the men who loved me, my girl friends at the convent and the Sisters there—they were all so hurt by my attitude to life, and so worried. Tragic, brilliant, spoiled Julia Lanier—what will become of her, what will she do

with her life?' For the first time since she had begun to talk, Keith caught an echo of the renowned irony which, heard over the air, could sting and burn. 'My friends stood round me like people waiting for—for the moon to rise or a bonfire to be lit. It was astonishing—so much worry, so much planning, and tact, and anxiety, about one girl of nineteen!'

She sighed then, and moved in his arms, and slowly sat upright. It had grown dark. 'Let's walk on, shall we? You must be cramped.'

He picked up his jacket and put it over her shoulders. He had listened to her with the strongest interest he had ever experienced outside his work, and the potency of the Tristan-spell had been strengthened, rather than weakened, by her soft, frank outpouring. This had replaced, in their relationship, those more commonplace elements which occur in a mere attraction, however sudden, and however truly felt.

In return he did not feel much impulse to tell her about a happy childhood in a doctor's household in Edinburgh, and an uninterruptedly triumphant progress through school and university into that world in which his work was done; a marriage that had failed (he supposed) because his wife had wanted qualities from him which were not in him to give; and his feeling for his son. His life had been—until the breaking of his marriage—satisfactory and manageable, and for him any romance in it had always been in his work. Now, looking at Julia walking beside him in the moonlight with his coat trailing from her shoulders, he experienced for the first time in his life the disturbing idea that here was someone who could be to him what his work was.

They skirted the edge of the field, and crossed a stile into the next one, which had not yet been scythed for hay. He thought that her feet must be very wet, for the dew had soaked his own heavier shoes, but the night was warm and probably she would not take any harm.

'Are your feet not wet?' he asked presently.

She stood still, and held out to him a small satin slipper dark to the instep with dew.

'They are soaking but I like the feel of it. Harrie will be mad, though (Harrie is my secretary, she gave me these shoes). But she won't tell me she is. May I go on telling you?'

He caught her hand and held it.

'At twenty-three I married again. This time I was very happy, although I could not have my children, either easily or, as some women do, with difficulty. My children died. I had miscarriage after miscarriage. Two daughters were born dead, and our son only lived for seven hours and four minutes.' The careful recording of this shortest of lives made Keith's throat ache.

'But we were intensely happy; frighteningly happy, I used to feel. I used to think, too, that one day our happiness would have to be paid for. My husband——'

'Don't tell me about him.'

'Oh, it has all gone. I never think about him now, and I am never happy now, in that particular way; I never will be again.' She turned to him. 'I don't know how it will be with you, but it will be quite different. And of course I know now that God took Johnnie away from me, and let my children die, so that I should have nothing to care about except working for peace. I don't know why He has let me find you. Perhaps it is a temptation. But I shouldn't think, would you, that my soul is important enough to be tempted like that?'

'God wants you to have some happiness, I should think.'

Keith was becoming more and more disturbed. He seemed not only to have known her for ever, but to have been searching for her for ever. Yet happiness, as he had always experienced happiness, was receding further with every

moment that he spent with her, as if a boat with white sails were disappearing steadily, remorselessly, over the horizon in far-off sunlight.

'Happiness doesn't matter. We have to learn to love something quite different from happiness. I expect we shall find out later why God let us find one another. I expect we are—a sacrifice, perhaps.' She said the word almost below her breath, and horror seemed to touch the dark air for an instant, and then be gone.

He had nothing brave and consoling to say in answer, because all the sense of mystery that haunts the Highland blood rose within him to greet what she said. It was as if he and she were in danger so great that all he could do was to put his soul and body between her and what threatened, so that he should feel the blow first. But the danger could not be denied nor the blow prevented.

'Can we go right up into the glen?' she asked, standing still and looking up to the dark, moon-shadowed heights.

'If you want to. But what about your dress?'

'It doesn't matter.' She was still looking upwards.

'I'll take you up to the ridge; we can see the Holy Isle from there,' he said, catching fire from her calmness, but he felt a sense of awe.

Nothing that had happened between them until now had set her so far apart from an ordinary woman as this. The women of his own family belonged to that flower of Scottish womanhood than which there is not any finer in the world; in them, courage and love are lit by intelligence, while duty holds the lamp to all three virtues. But no woman whom he had ever known would have sacrificed that dress without a word more than 'It doesn't matter'. If feminine pleasure in it had not saved it, decent economy would. The thought suddenly struck at him that Julia was both self-willed and rich.

She turned to him and smiled.

'No, it isn't because I could buy another if I wanted to. I have hardly any money just now. Last month I earned twenty-one thousand dollars, but the Treasury took a lot of it, and the rest I gave away to war victims, as I always do. I kept just enough for Harrie and me to live on for a month—not very luxuriously.' She came and stood close beside him and looked up at him and said in a low tone:

'I am boasting. I am sorry. But I want you to think well of me. Oh, I want it so much.'

He did not reply. Even when he had kissed her, he could find nothing to say, and in silence they began the climb up to the ridge.

He had always thought of this as the easy descent to the sea-loch, but to-night the final pitches, consisting of large boulders in which hands and feet must find crevices, seemed rough indeed, because he led Julia up them and felt their hardness and steepness through Julia's frailer body. The cold wind blew faintly through the ghostly dark blue air, chilling them, and their hands were scraped by the rough granite over which they climbed. When at last they stood on the ridge, looking down at the pale sea and black shadows spread below, he turned to her.

'Are you not cold, or tired?'

'Neither, at present, but we must find somewhere sheltered if we want to sit down; the wind is really cold up here.'

When they were crouching between two massive rocks, with his arm round her shoulders, he felt that he would like to smoke, but the wish was not strong and almost at once he forgot it. Her head leaned against his shoulder, and she was looking down upon the dimly glittering sea.

'Keith, I must tell you a little more about Johnnie. I don't want to, but only because you asked me not to; not

because it is painful to talk about him. When we had been married for eight years, he told me one day that he wanted a divorce in order to marry an ordinary woman. He loved an ordinary woman.' She paused. 'That was what he said. There had been no drifting apart, no quarrels, nothing to prepare me except, sometimes, little teasing remarks that I had hardly noticed. They were always about my being so different from other women. I told him that he could have his divorce, and then, because I could not bear the sympathy and the questions, I went away. A psychologist told me (I hadn't asked him, but he told me) that Johnnie wanted a wife whom he could dominate. I suppose that may have been it.'

After a long pause, she went on:

'I don't truly care for him any more, or care about my own nature, or about what people say. Truly, I don't. But sometimes, when I am very tired, I do wonder why he found me so different, and didn't want me any more.' She lifted her head from Keith's shoulder. 'Am I so different?' The tone was not provocative, but timid.

'Very different,' he answered, kissing her.

'Too different?'

He drew her down against him once more as if scorning to answer. But the boat with the white sails was almost out of sight. It was not that she seemed to him moody or capricious or 'difficult', and, even if she had seemed so, many women have been all these things, and yet been deeply loved and successfully lived with. It was her power, apparently so different from that of the conventional *grande amoureuse*, which threatened him with an extension of itself over his whole life and filled him with foreboding in the midst of love. The suddenness of their love's coming had prevented him, so far, from wondering what was to happen between them in the future, but already he felt that to live with Julia,

to love with her, might mean being always aware of her, even while he was working. Until now, his work had remained unaffected by anything that happened in his private life. But now he could no longer imagine this continuing.

She was not knowingly and deliberately possessive. Even after being with her for only two hours, he was certain that no woman could be less demanding in the fields of love. But supposing that she were, all unconsciously, like the moon that draws and pulls at the tides of the sea, dragging them up the steep shelves of the shore until their strength is wasted over a thousand beaches?

He looked down at her foreshortened brow and lips, and the smell of heather came up to him from her hair, and he forgot what he had been thinking.

When she began to speak again, her voice had changed into a higher, softer and more rapid tone, and he heard it with increasing fear and pity.

'After the divorce, I wandered about the world, staying with friends, or by myself in places I liked the look of (I still could like the look of a place, in those days). I read a lot; heavy books, deep books; I tried to understand politics and philosophy and economics; I even went to lectures, like any other poor fool of a woman trying to discover why two husbands had hated her. I tried, I did try, to take my grief as other women do. I was more and more unhappy. Nothing did any good until, one day, back home in Lanier, I went with an old African beggar back to the hovel where he lived. It was a squalid place, and he was half-starved. But, you know,' she lifted her head to look at him, 'pity is precious. It shouldn't be wasted on people who don't truly need it. Going into that stifling little black place, where the sunlight bit through the holes in the roof and the smell was like an animal's den, I suddenly found that I couldn't be

sorry for him because of those things. I found that we don't know much about the mercy of God, either; we think it's bestowed on us when—when our children don't die after all, or when some disaster is prevented. But I believe it's more delicate, more everyday, than that; I believe it goes on all the time, making the unbearable bearable, giving us peaceful sleep to keep us sane, or a quick death at the end of a day of torture in prison; giving us imagination to see right through horrors that—that——' her voice began to tremble and he held her fast, '—to the peace on the other side. It's so delicate, so tender, because He understands us as well as loving us. That's what I found out. You see, even that old blind man was alone all day. He had the place to himself until evening, when five others came in to push him off the straw and steal his bit of food, and he remembered a woman who had once loved him and been kind to him. He told me about her, nodding his old skull of a head; he boasted about their love. When he laughed, he seemed to be imitating a sound he used to make once, a long time ago. And that was all he wanted, to tell someone how good their love had been, and not to be pushed off the straw in the daytime, and the mercy o. God gave him both.'

Her voice was calmer, and she settled herself within Keith's arm.

'So I came away, feeling better. I didn't know why, but it was a fact; I didn't have any of the usual feelings; about being thankful that my lot wasn't worse and that sort of thing; I didn't even want—then—to help people like that old African (I've learnt, now, to call them Africans. Back home we always said niggers). But I had discovered the mercy of God, and how it works in quite ordinary ways that yet we can't guess, and I came to believe that God had let me learn about these ordinary mercies, granted to everybody, because I felt myself, then, to be so unordinary, a kind of

freak. And so I got to take myself for granted again, and to get better.'

It was now completely night over the island, and under the soft glimmer of stars and the light of the moon it was even difficult to remember how long daylight, with its fading yellow, had lingered in the west. Keith was neither hungry nor thirsty; his body and its needs seemed to be forgotten, and Julia had not once, since they had left the garden of the house, referred to the strangeness of their thus absenting themselves, nor to the probable anger of Sir James. She behaves as if we were Eve and Adam, alone in the world, Keith thought; and her complete ignoring of what would have troubled a more conventional woman called to all that was free in his own nature. But they were not Adam and Eve, and they were not alone in the world, and his exalted mood was touched with apprehension.

She had been silent for some time, looking at the sea. Now she pulled down his head until their cheeks touched.

'This is the bad part, what I'm going to tell you now.'

'All right, my heart. I'm here.'

'One fall, some time after Pearl Harbour, I was staying with friends far up in the North. There was nothing for me to do in those days, except to get what satisfaction I could out of living; I didn't do any 'war-work'; and I didn't care about anything, except the gradually increasing bearableness of my own life. I went out alone for a walk, one afternoon. It was a very beautiful day. I remember that; I remember how the trees were turning, and the sky was without a cloud, and how I walked down the road leading from my friends' house to the woods, because that was the last time the world was to look beautiful to me. I didn't meet anyone, except a woman and some children, going in the opposite direction.' Her voice became slower, and he tightened his grasp about her as he felt her body begin to shake. 'They

were ordinary cheerful people, I didn't notice them much, because I was thinking about trees, but I said hello to the children, and then, when I had gone a little way——'

'Take your time, darling. Or don't tell me, if you'd rather not.'

'It isn't that. It isn't that I'd rather not. But I can't, not for a minute. I can't.'

'Steady, love. I'm here, Julia.'

But she was shaking, as if tossed to and fro by an electric drill that made no sound, and did not hear what he said.

'I walked on—and I was looking at the trees—and I heard a sound behind me, a kind of sharp crack, not very loud or frightening, not like that at all—and I turned quickly round, and then one of the children—I heard——'

Now she had risen and was kneeling before him, and he was holding her as tightly as he had the power to grip, and yet the violence of her trembling was flinging her backwards and forwards and her mouth was the square of the Greek mask of agony and her eyes the sightless ones of the Greek mask.

'It was screaming—and they were lying in the road, all——'

Keith forced her down on to his coat and wiped her forehead. He looked down on her contorted face, with every feeling driven out of him but pity.

'It stopped, the screaming, before I could get to them, and I fell down in the road. When I got up I was sick, but I stayed on my knees and prayed, and I promised I would give my life and my miserable self and everything I had to peace. Some people came running up, and I was sick again, and someone took me back to my friends. I wasn't hurt at all.'

'It was a floating bomb launched by the Japanese,' she said, low and wearily, when she was again resting against his shoulder. 'They released some in Japan, on the chance of

their doing some damage, and they had floated all those thousands of miles, through storms and calms, until they fell on a woman and her children in Canada.'

Keith sat with his arm about her, holding her as lovingly as at the beginning of her story, but the ship with the white sails was out of sight and the horizon quite dark. He felt very tired. He loved her; and his rivals were a compulsive agony; and peace; and the entire human race; abstractions, Eumenides, tearing Julia into fragments. What sort of a creature was this that lay warm and trembling in his arms?

'So now——' she said at last, so faintly that he could hardly hear, 'what's going to happen to you and me?'

Again he did not answer. He could not speak the words of comfort and love that came to his lips. He seemed to have returned to the real world after being in a dream, whose beauty and horror made it impossible, now, for him to discuss and plan. The unpractical bias of his character had been increased by the retired and dedicated nature of his work and abrupt decisions were not congenial to him. At the moment, he only wanted to sit in silence with her, but, feeling that she wanted to talk with him, he reluctantly roused himself.

'I saw you for the first time three hours ago, and I love you. That's the most important thing, isn't it?'

'The only thing. But—"let's see your pay book, sailor".' As she turned to him she was, to his extreme surprise, laughing.

'Is that a quotation?' smiling too, but secretly disturbed by the rapid changing of her moods.

'Yes. The little chambermaid at my hotel in Glasgow said it to the sailors she goes with, to find out if they're married.'

'So you talk to little chambermaids about their sailors?'

'I have to, sometimes. Otherwise I'd never know what people are thinking and feeling; I'd have to rely on Gallup

polls and that kind of thing. But you haven't answered. "Let me see your pay book," Keith.'

'I am not married any more,' he said, after a tiny pause, in which he felt that he was talking to another woman than the one who had just lain, white and shaking, on his coat. 'I divorced my wife two years ago.'

'For unfaithfulness?'

He nodded. The nearness of Julia's dark oval face to his own, and the faint scent from her dress and hair, made Vera seem even more a memory and a ghost, but his pride was stinging.

'How extraordinary.' The musing tone was more intoxicating than any passionate cry of sympathy. 'I cannot understand unfaithfulness. I am wearisomely, tediously, unwaveringly constant. Do you know how humiliating it is to be faithful? I love people long after they are sick to death of me.'

For the first time Keith laughed.

'Oh, you may laugh (do it again—it's a lovely noise). But usually it takes me a long time to love. Anything like this has never happened to me before.'

'Nor to me. I can hardly believe it has happened.'

'It's a terrible thing for both of us,' she said after a pause, 'because I simply do not feel that I have the strength to go on without you. I want to be with you all the time, by day and by night, I am ravenous, now, for some personal happiness; I cannot help it; I am.'

'But, my heart,' and he held her close, 'you need not have the strength to go on without me. We can be together, if you want it, for the rest of our lives. We are both free. We can be married just as soon as you like. It cannot be too soon for me.'

He spoke with tenderness and decision, but while he was speaking he saw the small new villa in a row of twenty others edging a raw unpaved road, the chilly rooms dull

with dust, the face of his elderly genteel housekeeper whose complaints rose to a crescendo when his son was home for the school holidays. What had this to do with the moonlit night and Julia?

'I have a boy of thirteen,' he said.

'I hate your wife for having given him to you, but I shall love him, himself. Is he like you?

'He is like his mother,' reluctantly.

'It doesn't matter. I love him. Keith, how much of what I am doing will you want me to give up?'

'Darling, how can I say? I have hardly had time to realize yet that we have found each other. And you're so famous; I can hardly take that in, either. I won't want you to give up anything that makes you happy——'

'What I do doesn't make me happy. I haven't known happiness, as most women know it, for twelve years. I do what I do because—I—promised my life—to God,' she ended gaspingly, as if a thought had struck her that took away her breath.

'Julia——' but he broke off, hesitating. She was no mere deluded and unhappy woman who could be told gently that her vow had been given under conditions of appalling shock. She was Julia Lanier, gifted with genius in voice and in eloquence, and her immense influence upon the inarticulate men and women of the world was coveted by the warring parties of East and West. This was Julia Lanier who crouched within the circle of his arms; Julia Lanier.

'I want to give it all up,' she said suddenly, and disengaged herself gently. She stood up, and began to wrap his coat about her shoulders. 'I am tired of my work. I'm lonely, too. That's why I came here, to rest and see old friends. For months I have been wondering just how much influence I truly have? Whether people would refuse to make weapons, if war were near, because of what I have

tried to tell them? Whether anyone loves any foreigner any better, because of what I have said? They listen to me, and watch me, of course, but isn't that because they always love any kind of show? Until to-night, whenever I wondered whether what I am doing was of any use, I always ended by deciding that it was my duty to go on whether I felt confident or not, because I had vowed my wretched little life to God, and because I was doing His work. But since you looked at me, three hours ago, I am a different person; or rather, I am the person I once used to be, the girl who lived in Lanier twenty years ago. I have gone back, and all the violence and pain are forgotten.'

She was standing still, looking down at him and speaking without emphasis. The words came to him simply; perhaps it was their unhurried pace and their clearness that made them seem inhuman. The setting moon shone dimly upon her face and the pale dress, half-concealed at the shoulders by his coat. She appeared to him like a dark spirit, uttering an incantation while standing upon another plane; she looked like a woman too, but he could not feel that she was one. Already he felt in himself the desire to give to her endlessly, without stint, and suddenly he remembered a man he had once known who had spent all that he had in money and love and hope upon a woman, and how, ruined as he was at the last, he had yet seemed in some strange way a fuller man than those who had condemned his madness.

He climbed out of the hollow in the rocks and stretched his cramped limbs. He put these thoughts from him and took Julia's hand and drew her arm within his own.

'This track leads down to the coast road; we can get back that way to the sea.'

'Need we?' she asked, as they began to move onwards.

He glanced at her and smiled.

'Haven't you left a secretary and some clothes there?'

'Yes. But I could wire to Harrie to meet me at your house, and the clothes are only old ones; I have some more somewhere. Or I could buy some. But where *do* you live, Keith? (Keith . . . it whistles like a sword in an old story. Do you know that in the South we still like stories of chivalry in war? That's a thing which has gone out of the world now, like the scent of musk.) Where do you live, my love?'

'Lanwell,' he said.

They were going rather quickly down the track between the bog cotton and heather, and when she stopped dead she almost threw him off his balance.

'Where did you say?' she gasped.

'At Lanwell, in Essex.'

He had begun to tremble. The spell darted to and fro between them as the current does between anode and cathode.

'But that's the place where—why do you live in that terrible place?'

'My work's there,' he managed to say. 'I live there because of my work.'

'*What is it? Tell me what it is?*'

'I'm a physicist. I'm working on atomic research——'

'*For war? Is it for war?*'

'Yes. But, Julia——'

The words were drowned in her prolonged scream. She fell to the ground on her face, and lay there writhing.

Night

HE tried to lift her, but she dragged herself away from him. She had fallen with her head amidst the stones and heather of the downward slope, and (the moon having at that

moment gone behind a cloud) he could see only a white blur at his feet, that now flung out its arms, and tried to claw its way along the ground, uttering moaning sounds. He was terrified lest she should roll right over, faster and faster down the steep incline, until she struck against a boulder. Almost demented, he knelt beside her and gripped the stiff, dewy hem of her dress and tried to wind it like a strait jacket about her threshing limbs, while over and over again he imploringly called her name. Presently her contortions began to grow less violent, and at last she lay almost still, except for the shudders that now and again ran along her body. The moon came out from the cloud, and he saw her face, staring with dilated eyes and opened mouth straight up into the stars. When he gently shook her, she neither moved nor spoke.

He let her arms fall, and stared round him in search of help. He did not expect any; he hardly knew, indeed, what he was doing; but at that moment he heard a faint shout farther down the glen, and thought he saw a bright flash of light. While he knelt beside her, looking eagerly towards it, the cry came again, and the flash re-appeared. It was the light of a torch, and now it began to move slowly upwards, between the dim blue knolls of heather and the shadows cast by boulders in the light of the moon.

He did not shout, for fear of frightening Julia. He stood up, still looking at her in case she should move, and waved his arms above his head in the now bright moonlight, and the mounting light (he saw out of the corner of his eye) swerved to the left, as if it had seen the way up to them. Now, looking away from her for an instant, he could see that it was carried by a man who wore an overcoat but no hat, and who was coming up the rough slope in long strides. When he reached them he was panting as if his heart must break. It was Sir James.

He took no notice of Keith, but knelt beside Julia and lifted her so that she lay against his breast.

'I expected this,' he said in a low, grating voice, bending greedily over her white face and the now-closed eyes, cradling her, with his lips almost touching her hair. He muttered something that sounded to Keith like '*that little bitch Catherine, who planned it all*', then looked up at him. 'We must get her home,' he said roughly.

Keith wanted to get her out of the old man's arms. He knelt again to slip his own arms beneath her, but as soon as she felt his touch, she shrank towards Sir James and opened her eyes.

'Julia? How are you now, my dearie?'

At the sound of the gloating yet paternal tone, she became still.

'I'm all right,' she said faintly, in a moment.

She leaned away from Sir James and slowly sat up, with her weight resting on her hands outspread on either side of her. She did not look at Keith. The thinnest possible veil of cloud blew across the moon, dimming the air for a second or so, and they heard a dog barking far down at the glen's edge, where the homestead lights were shining. Keith became aware of how still the night was and how clear and dark the depths of the sky.

'Can ye walk, Julia?' asked Sir James, at last.

In answer she held out her hands, one to each man, and they drew her to her feet, and she stood, swaying a little. Keith moved deliberately nearer to her, and drew her within the circle of his arm, but she did not lean towards him. Only her eyes, as if lured by a spell, slowly turned towards him until she was once more looking into his. He was forced to control a shivering of his flesh. The spell was strong as it had ever been, but it had changed. The word *enemy* came into his mind. Yet her eyes were filled with love.

'Can ye walk home, Julia?' demanded Sir James again.

She nodded.

He turned on Keith.

'Go on home, will you, Keith, and have them get a fire going in Miss Lanier's room—hot whusky—hot water bottles—all that sort of thing, and tell her secretary what's happened, and that we'll want Julia's bed ready. And send Catherine, if you see her, to her own bed. I'm not seeing her again this night.'

He turned to Julia, and began asking if she were sure that she could walk, should he ask Keith to tell them to send the car down to the end of the glen, if she could walk that far?

'Will you be all right? Do you want me to go?' Keith said to her, interrupting the flow of questions. He knew that he was only trying to draw her attention to himself, but he was unable to resist the temptation. Was she never going to speak to him again?

'Yes, do go, please. I'd rather you did.' Then she smiled, but she looked so ill that the smile did little to comfort him. As he hurried off into the blue moonlight and the shadows, he felt for the first time since he had met her a sensation of impatience. It did not focus itself upon her; he was still too concerned about her for that; it took the form of wishing to be walking with her in comparative peace, as they had been an hour ago; and then, unsummoned, there came to his mind a picture of the laboratory, looking as tranquil as it was familiar. *I am getting too old for these sort of cantrips*, was the dour thought that came, also unbidden, into his head as he strode down the glen.

When he was out of sight, Sir James turned again to Julia.

'Lean on me, my darling. You're safe now; I've sent him away. Shall we be going on—if ye feel ye can walk now?'

'I don't want any help, Jimmie. I can walk perfectly.'

She moved away from him and began to walk down the track. He stood looking sulkily at her for a moment, then sighed, and followed. In a moment she stopped and looked back at him. He hurried forward.

'Is Keith's coat there? I'm cold . . . no, not yours. It fell off my shoulders, back there.'

He slowly drew on again the light overcoat he had been shedding, and went sullenly back and looked about the spot where she had been lying until he found the coat. When he had taken it down to her, and she had wrapped it round herself (putting her cheek against the cloth for a moment as she did so) they set off again down the glen. Julia walked as swiftly as if nothing had ailed her, moving with bent head and eyes fixed upon the miniature but dangerous crevices and precipices of the track, which presently opened out on to the road running beside the sea. When they came to this point, and Sir James realized that in half an hour they would be at home, he increased his pace until he was walking beside her; he had been following at a distance of some yards with a hangdog face and in silence.

'I never saw such a woman!' he burst out. 'I'd have said you were dying when I saw you up there lying on the ground. And aren't you going to say a word to me about what the trouble is? Is it his work? Is that it? That little bitch Catherine told me she planned the whole thing. Is that what upset ye, his work?'

She looked round at him and nodded. Her face was calm except for a frown wrinkling the great benevolent curve of the forehead; its pressure was narrowing her eyes almost into slits.

'Did Catherine know what his work is?' she asked softly, as if exhausted.

'She did. She says she's known it this last year, and saved the knowing of it up to hurt you, if she got the chance.'

Julia said nothing.

'After you'd gone off with him this evening I got hold of her and made her tell me what she looked so pleased about. I had to twist the wrists almost off her, but I got it out of her. It was a "revenge"—if you'll believe a girl could be such a fool—because she believes you injured her mother.'

'You mean, because you once wanted to marry me?' she asked indifferently.

'That's it. Catherine thought that when you found out what Keith's work is you'd get such a shock that you would——'

'Go mad, perhaps,' Julia said, into the silence.

'Something like that,' in a lowered tone and reluctantly.

'Well, I haven't,' she said, at last. 'I wish I had.'

'Don't talk like that, my darling, don't.'

She did not answer.

'Julia, I know I'm not much. I'm thirty years older than you, I'm not educated, I'm not much to look at. But I've loved you for ten years. Isn't there a chance for me? Just a chance?'

'Don't crawl, Jimmie; you know I hate it.'

They did not speak again until they were within sight of the house.

Keith, arriving there half an hour before them, saw by the door and windows still standing open that the place had not yet been locked up for the night, and was surprised, on looking at his watch, to see that it was barely eleven o'clock. There were lights in some of the bedrooms, and the curtains were drawn back from the living-room windows, and he could see into the room. Miss Hatton was in there alone, sitting by the fire with a book. He went up to the open window and called to her through it:

'Miss Hatton?'

She started, and got up and came over to him.

'Are you alone? Where's Julia?'

'She's all right. I left her with Sir James, but she . . . she was taken ill. She's coming home with him now, and I came on ahead to see that everything was ready . . . hot water bottle, whisky, that sort of thing. Have the servants gone to bed?'

'I don't want the servants in on this,' said Miss Hatton, and put her book down on a chair. 'I expect you know where the kitchen is?'

He came in through the window, and in silence she followed him across the hall and down a passage, into a large kitchen, which had been painted white like the rest of the house and fitted with every contemporary device to persuade servants to stay and work in it: it was empty, the servants having made their preparations for the next day and gone up to bed.

'Electric—goody,' muttered Miss Hatton. 'I thought maybe I would have to rub sticks together.'

But the atmosphere was not cosy, in spite of her small joke. She neither bustled nor smiled as she put the heavy kettle on the plate and switched on the currents and Keith leaned against the table, watching the preparations without seeing them and too sick at heart to talk.

She looked across at him.

'Did she fall on the ground and scream?'

He nodded.

'What were you talking about? Atomic weapons?'

'Yes. That's my work; I'm a research physicist. How did you know?'

'Because all Julia's horror of war has concentrated itself on the atomic weapons, and if they are so much as mentioned, the full force of what modern war means strikes her, and she just can't take it.'

She looked at the rubber bottle lying on the table, in its blue felt case.

'This—this business with hot water, and whisky, is like trying to put out a volcano with a watering-can. But she does feel cold after one of these—attacks, fits—I don't know what to call them, each name is more psychopathic than the last and none of them help—and so maybe a hot water bottle isn't so darned silly as it seems.'

She filled the bottle and handed it to Keith. 'There's plenty of whisky in the bar.' Then she led the way out of the kitchen, and he switched off the lights as they passed.

'I'll go and put this in her bed,' she said, when they came to the foot of the stairs.

He was still standing there, staring at the floor, when she came down.

'The only thing you can do now is to have a drink—you look as if you need one,' she said. 'There is no use being patient, or brave, or sensible; I've tried all that; it doesn't work. You have to sit still, and hold her head while she vomits, and let the attack go past you—over you—as if it was a storm that you can't help. No one ever tells us anything nowadays about endurance; it's one of the forgotten techniques; but it's the only one I can use when this happens to Julia.' She had been mixing him some brandy and water while she talked, and now she handed him the drink.

'Does it often happen to her?' he asked, swallowing half of it.

'Every time the atomic weapons are mentioned; I told you. I've seen it happen to her at a dinner party—but that time she just began to cry as if her heart was broken, softly, like a woman who is tired out. It was a wonderful thing to see, in a way, because no one was embarrassed. People got up and crowded round her, loving and comforting her. The tears of Christ must have been like that.'

He looked up.

'No, I can't imagine Julia and embarrassment in the same world. I never met anyone who——' he broke off.

There was a long pause, and then Miss Hatton said:

'Sir James got talking to the girl—Catherine, isn't it?—after dinner, picking on her, you know, about how the house was run, and they started to quarrel, so I came in here. I heard him shouting at her and then she was screaming. In the middle of it the houseman came in, looking aggressively respectable, as if to reassure me, and put a log on the fire, and said it was a fine evening. With which I agreed. Then nothing happened for about half an hour while I read my book upside down, and then Sir James came in looking like an atomic explosion himself, and said he was going out to look for Julia because he had heard something that had upset him and he wanted to be with her before she got to hear of it. So I was all steamed up for hearing something——' she sighed and the flippancy left her voice, 'when you came in.'

Keith had not heard much of what she said, but when she mentioned Catherine he looked up, and when she had done, he said:

'I've been wondering about something Sir James said when he found us. It was something about "Catherine planned it all". Do you know anything about that?'

Miss Hatton shook her head. The events of the evening had caused her to forget her suspicions of earlier in the day.

'Where is Catherine now?'

'Gone up to bed, I think; I don't know. I haven't seen her since dinner.'

'They ought to be here by now; do you think Julia is ill again?' he asked, turning to the window.

'No; it's unlikely. If she is ill again (and she's usually

terribly sick after these attacks) it will be late to-night, after she's in bed. I have the room next to hers and I know what to do. And she won't die, and you can't do anything, so do stop looking like that; I am sorry to talk to you as if you were a boy of twenty——'

'She has had that effect on me,' he said, and was silent.

'I suppose you want to marry her,' Miss Hatton said at last.

He shook his head, but she did not think that he was answering her question with a negative; the movement suggested weariness and bewilderment.

'Actually,' she said slowly, 'that is something that you could do. If she were married again, and as happily as she could be—now—and if her mind could be slowly won away from that perpetual milling over these things that she *cannot* fight, these horrors that she *cannot* face—then she might get better.'

'It's a disease,' he said, as if to himself.

'Can't you understand how she feels?' sharply.

'Not altogether, Miss Hatton. You see, the women of my own family are so different. If my mother or one of my sisters had been overcome as Julia was to-night, I should have said that it was hysteria and cowardice.'

'Strong words,' Miss Hatton said.

'They are only words. They don't make any difference.' He shook his head slowly. 'When she looked at me again—when we looked at each other—after she had come round this evening, I forgot everything except—this feeling that we have.'

Miss Hatton was standing up.

'They're coming over the lawn,' she said.

When they drew near to the house, walking with dragging steps along the road in the dim glow of the moon at

its setting, Sir James broke a silence that had lasted for nearly an hour.

'Catherine's the one I blame for it all. Ye need never have met the man.'

'I wish I never had.'

'Do you? You really wish that?'

'No—no, I don't. But of course, now, I can't marry him.'

'It had gone as far as that between you, had it? In three hours?'

'Stop torturing yourself. Yes, it had. It was like some wonderful illness infecting us both, and it knocked us both out. I am still full of infection, and so is he, but now we have got to get well. There are other things to be done.'

He glanced at her.

'You're an amazing woman, Julia. Up at the house, they'll hardly believe there's been anything the matter with you. But all the same, you had best go straight to bed when you do get in; you're putting a brave face on it, my darling, but you're ill inside.'

'Yes. I am ill inside. All right, I'll go straight to bed, Jimmie. Don't let anyone worry me. Tell everyone I'm better—say I simply felt faint, if you like (everybody who knows anything about me will know better, but what does it matter?) and ask Harrie to come up to me. I'm going in this way, then no one will see me.'

She pushed open a small door in a projecting wall, that led into a garden room, passed through the dimness and the smell of fern and wet earth, and went across the brightly-lit hall and up the stairs.

Sir James entered the house through the front door, which stood open, and stayed to shut and carefully lock it behind him before going into the living-room. Keith and Miss Hatton both turned from the window to look at him, and for a moment no one spoke.

'Has Julia gone up to bed?' Keith asked at last.

'She has. She's feeling better, but very tired, and she doesn't want to see anyone except Miss Hatton.' He turned to the secretary. 'She said would you go up to her, please.'

Miss Hatton nodded, an undisturbed nod. She knew that it was not Julia's habit to want her presence immediately after one of these attacks, for she was not accustomed to pour out the story of her sufferings to Harrie almost before they were over. So she sat on, receiving from the reluctant hand of Sir James a glass of her preferred drink, and tried to decide, as she sat sipping between the silent men, what she wanted to happen between Keith and Julia. It was quite plain to her that if there had been the promise of an idyll, it was ended. Julia would neither marry, nor become the love of, a man engaged on research in the atomic weapons. Miss Hatton thought that when she had discovered what Keith did, the shock and the revulsion must have been strong enough to destroy instantaneously the spell between them; to, in fact, atomize it. Keith might still be under its dominion, but Miss Hatton was certain that Julia was not, and the most likely thing to happen was that Julia would avoid him during the remaining day and evening of the visit, and leave early on Monday morning without saying good-bye to him; she might even, if she could escape pressure from Sir James to stay the full time, leave the island to-morrow morning.

Miss Hatton thought that personally she would like this best of all. She did not care for what she had seen of the place; the soft clarity of the light, the soft dim colours and the drifting odours always cool with damp and rain seemed to her both unhealthy and relaxing, and not for the first time during her visit, she thought with affection of the thin, hard soil and the rocks and the gnarled, reserved people of her native Connecticut.

She came out of her unaccustomed reverie, into which the prolonged absence of her conventional duties and temporary forgetfulness of her status had led her, to become aware for how long both her companions had been silent, how each was looking into his glass rather than at the other or anywhere else, shaking the liquid gently to and fro, and occasionally drinking a little, while the room itself seemed to have grown colder and more quiet. As she looked up, Sir James emptied his glass.

'I'm going to bed,' he announced, 'if you'll forgive me. That tramp up to the glen and back's tired me out; I'd forgotten it was so steep.' He looked straight across at Keith. 'Will you be staying until Monday, or are you off to-morrow?'

Keith took the challenge with indifference.

'That will depend on what Julia wants me to do.'

They looked at one another for a few seconds without speaking, and Miss Hatton was able to judge from Keith's expression that he was still under the Tristan-spell, as she had supposed he must be. Sir James set his hard mouth into a harder line.

'Keith, you're an old friend and I can warn you plainly; Julia may not want to see you or speak to you again. Her feelings about the kind of work you're doing are so strong that—well, if it were anyone but Julia I would say that she isn't quite sane on that one subject. Hasn't that got home to you, after what's happened this evening? Oh, I know you'll say that I have an axe to grind; I admit it; I have; but the fact is, I can't face the thought of to-morrow, with you and Julia avoiding each other all over the island and Miss—er—here——' he sent a mechanical smile in Harrie's direction, 'reading that whodunit upside down for hours on end. Really, if you did the right thing, you'd go away before Julia's up to-morrow.'

Keith only shook his head and finished his drink.

'Well,' said Sir James, and shrugged his shoulders with the theatricality that occasionally betrayed his exhibitionism, 'I can't turn you out. Stay if you want to. But I'm not responsible.'

He limped over to the door. 'Good night,' he said, without turning round, and went out of the room.

Miss Hatton did not stay for three minutes after he had gone. One glance at Keith's face told her that he wanted a long talk about what had occurred as little as she did, and, picking up her embroidery and book, she said 'Good night' to him clearly, and got herself out of the room.

She was not unsympathetic towards him; she even pitied him; but when she compared her concern for him with her concern for Julia, he and his presumed sufferings weighed with her not at all. Her task (she thought, as she went up the lonely, lit stairs to her room) must be to get Julia away from here, with as little delay and as little pain as possible. Nothing else mattered to her.

As she opened her door, she saw someone coming out of another door some distance down the passage. It was Catherine, wearing a spotted silk dressing robe and moving her hands gently over her forearms as she came. She was looking down at her wrists as she walked, and did not see Miss Hatton, who, even at that distance, plainly saw their blackened and empurpled flesh.

Miss Hatton went into her room and shut the door. She crossed to the dressing table and began methodically to take off ear-rings and necklace, because it was not her habit to make dramatic gestures, but in a moment the thought which had staggered her when she saw Catherine made her so angry that she threw her comb on the floor. She was blaming herself for her own stupidity, as much as condemning Catherine and her malice, for she had not realized, until this moment,

what was Catherine's revenge and how successful it had been.

During the dead of the night, while she was holding Julia's brain between her hands and wiping Julia's mouth as the wrenched nerves exacerbated themselves in bout after bout of vomiting, Miss Hatton heard gasping confessions of love for Keith mingled with words of horror about his work, but gradually the theme began to change, and there was less about the impossibility of any union. What Julia began to say, over and over again, was that he must give up his work or she could not marry him: and then, as night moved on unnoticed by either woman towards dawn, Miss Hatton heard no more about marriage or love; she only heard the weak voice insisting, over and over again, that he must give up his work; that he must be forced to see how horrible it was; and must give it up; and these were the final words she heard before there was a prolonged and exhausted silence, seeming to express itself in the faint pallor growing in the room, in which Julia lay with closed eyes saying nothing. Miss Hatton did not think that she was asleep, but she realized with a breath of relief that the night and the suffering were over, and so went quietly away.

When the sky was full of pure colourless light, coming from behind grey clouds lying very low over the earth, and the house too was full of it so that the eye could see to read, Julia got up from her bed and went quickly out of the room and down the stairs. Her limbs trembled with weakness and her head was light and clear; she felt no more misery or sense of shock; it was a blessed state, in which she might have been a spirit redeemed. She floated rather than walked across the hall, and went into the small room where were kept Sir James's books of reference and where his secretaries worked, and there searched the shelf of books for *Who's*

Who. When she had found the page she wanted, she stood for a long time studying it; beautiful in her worn robe of wool and the shabby slippers, but had anyone seen her then, her beauty would not have been the first impression conveyed to the onlooker. It would have been her detachedness. She seemed to regard herself no more than does a stone or water. Presently she replaced the book on the shelf, and went upstairs and again lay down upon her bed. She remained awake with her eyes shut until, at eight o'clock, she opened them to see between the folds of the window curtains a line of warm grey sky.

Second Day: Morning

WHEN Keith awoke, late, and after a night passed almost without sleep, she hovered in his memory more as a sensation, a sweet sound or a scent, rather than a thought, and he had forgotten the disastrous end of their time together. When, almost at once, he remembered it, he winced with pain.

As he went downstairs to breakfast at the sound of the second bell, he did not want to see her, because he dreaded the suffering if she should look at him as she had on the previous night; with their former spellbound gaze, but so that there formed within his mind, unescapably, the word *enemy*. He decided that he must talk to her. He loved her, and he meant to make her his wife or, at least, to join their lives together in some way. Yet the memory of their tranced hours together was so strong that, even to link their lives for perhaps thirty years, he did not want to break its spell. He was in no mood for arguing and defending himself and his

work, or for quoting figures and facts, and he also felt that such proofs of his work's necessity would have no effect upon Julia. He was weary. He felt (already, and before anything had been said which it was impossible to withdraw) that he could see a little way ahead of this love; as if it were already ended; as if he looked at a lofty wall, and deduced from the treetops waving above it and the clouds going by what kind of a landscape lay beyond.

There was no one in the breakfast-room but a maid, who had just brought in some covered dishes and was arranging them over an electrical device to keep them hot, and when Keith had exchanged a good morning with her and she had gone away, he sat down at the long table of wrought ironwork painted white, which was covered with a blue checked cloth and had a white glazed breakfast service arranged upon it, and looked out at the quiet sea. He hoped that Julia would not come in before the other members of the party.

It was Sir James who came in first, followed almost at once by Miss Hatton, and they both looked as tired as Keith felt. They breakfasted almost in silence, and one of the odd thoughts that came into Keith's head was a grateful one that no one young was present, to talk to him when he wanted to be quiet.

Half-way through the meal, which was slender for them all, Julia came into the room, dressed in the old skirt and the jersey which she had worn yesterday but in which Keith had never seen her. When he studied her face, which he did as soon as she had met his eyes and smiled calmly at him, he saw that the brown stains beneath her eyes were webbed with wrinkles fine as spiders silk, that she looked thinner; and that her hair, which yesterday had seemed to float from her head, lay limply against it as if tired. He wondered if she would say that she was sorry for the terror and the pain she

had caused them last night. Most women would have apologized, and he felt that she should have. But she sat down and began to drink tea, and said nothing. Presently he noticed how calming, how soothing, her silence was, and he began to forgive her, yet still some conventional strain in his nature was shocked. He had never dreamt that a woman could be so self-sufficient, and then he suddenly thought what it would mean to lose her now, and he found that the thought was not bearable.

'Come for a drive round the coast with me, Julia?' Sir James said presently, sliding as he spoke his blue almond-shaped eyes, the eyes of a handsomer man, round at Keith.

'I'm going down to the shore all day,' she answered, shaking her head, 'I want some more shells.'

Miss Hatton was the only person whose sense of outrage was not aroused by this little-girl statement of a modest wish. As Julia spoke she eased over her shoulder one of the canvas bags carried yesterday by herself and Catherine, and both men looked at her with as much exasperation as they dared to show. I know what it is, Miss Hatton thought suddenly, pinching her toast crumbs into a prissy heap, she doesn't take desire seriously. I've been with her all these years and never realized it. No wonder that men sometimes hate her.

'All right, my dearie,' Sir James said in a moment, having swallowed his disappointment, and tasted its bitterness, 'so long as you can amuse yourself.'

'I'm looking forward to it,' said Julia.

'Good, good, that's good, I hope you will get some rest here after all, in spite of——' he broke off. Julia said nothing, and her expression was calm. But it was not placid. Sir James crossed to the door, and hesitated there for a moment with his back turned to the room and his hand on the knob, giving to some of those who watched him a guilty im-

pression that they had made him feel ill at ease in his own house. Then he half-turned and said to Julia:

'Take it easy to-day, that's all. You will, won't you? You're a precious thing, you know, and you've got to take care of yourself for all our sakes. Hasn't she?' with a grisly pretence that the feelings of everyone present were sensible and kindly and full of good will.

'It's time she took care of herself for her own sake,' Keith said, dragging his eyes away from Julia's face.

'Do leave her alone, Sir James,' Miss Hatton said suddenly; she looked ten years older this morning than her age, 'it's a waste of your valuable time to advise her.'

Julia had been returning the gaze of Keith. Now she slowly turned her head until she was looking through the open window at the sea, where birds hovered over the long fetch of the waves.

Sir James laughed mechanically and, after a moment more of hesitation, went out of the room.

'I'm going down to the shore now,' said Julia, standing up. She looked at Keith. 'Will you come?'

'In ten minutes. I want to talk to Miss Hatton.'

Julia nodded, and stepped over the sill. She turned to smile at Harrie while she again adjusted the bag hanging over her shoulder, then walked away over the lawn.

As soon as she had gone Keith turned to Miss Hatton.

'It's not important, but it occurred to me last night that perhaps Catherine *had* planned all this; arranged that Julia and I should meet because she knew how—upset—Julia would be when she found that she was talking to an atomic physicist; only I cannot for the life of me think why she should play such a dirty trick. Can you?'

Before Miss Hatton could reply, the door opened and Catherine came in, dressed in outdoor clothes. Her face looked even younger than usual, because seventeen years old

can awaken refreshed after only four hours of sleep, and it wore a gratified, secretive expression. 'Hullo, I didn't come down to breakfast, because I was seeing about my packing, but I expect Julia looked after you. I heard her being sick all last night, but I saw her just now out of my window, and she looked all right to me.'

Miss Hatton regarded her with silent detestation.

'Packing? Are you going away?' asked Keith, without smiling.

'I'm being *sent* away. Back to a hell-hole calling itself the Villa Catalina, in Lucerne, from which I returned rejoicing exactly a fortnight ago.'

'You don't seem pleased about it.'

'Oh, I don't mind. The students will serenade me, if there are any left at their *lycée* and I shall have—other things to do. And Ronnie's flying me over.'

Neither Miss Hatton nor Keith said anything.

'So I'll say good-bye, I think,' said Catherine. Out of the corner of his eye, Keith saw Miss Hatton slowly move her hands until they rested behind her back.

'Good-bye.' He took Catherine's small moist hand in his. It isn't the hand of a healthy child, he thought, and then, thinking of Julia being sick all night, he suddenly felt angry.

'Isn't this rather a sudden departure?' he said stiffly.

'Daddy gave me the works last night and told me I'd got to go. So I'm going.'

Miss Hatton said suddenly out of a blotched face:

'I'm glad he realizes what a dangerous little bitch you are.'

'Well!' Catherine turned upon her, radiant with satisfied malice. 'Another country has been heard from!' She made the American idiom sound as if she were condescending into Miss Hatton's language.

Miss Hatton turned to Keith.

'Your guess was quite right, a minute ago. She did plot the whole thing. She arranged that you should be here, and that Julia should meet you. If Julia had known that anyone doing your kind of work was going to be here, she would never have come. She,' turning to Catherine, 'hates Julia because, years ago, Sir James wanted to marry her.'

'He still does. It's a kind of disease,' Catherine said.

'And she thinks that drove her mother away . . . or so she says. So she thought up this—this Teenager's Revenge. It doesn't matter of course.' Miss Hatton's eyes searched Keith's face for confirmation, but did not find it. 'Julia's all right this morning.'

'Is she?' Catherine turned to Keith, and her voice went up. 'Are you?'

Miss Hatton looked at her with a loathing that seemed to spout from her face. Keith had nothing to say. He put his hands into his pockets and looked at the floor.

'Well, I'm going,' said Catherine, and went towards the door. 'Julia can play hostess when I'm gone; the servants seem crazy about her anyway, so I suppose they'll do what she tells them. But she isn't to go near the dogs, or to feed them or anything. Understand?' to Miss Hatton. 'I've arranged for someone I can trust to look after them. I don't want *you* poisoning them, in a sort of Change of Lifer's Revenge. I've seen to everything. They're going to be with a boy from the farm; he's here now, and he'll sleep with them until you've gone. I'm not taking any chances; I know what people are like.'

'Oh hush up, you little psychopath,' said Miss Hatton, and turned her back and walked over to the window.

'It was a filthy trick, Catherine,' Keith said.

'It was meant to be. I couldn't be more pleased at the way it's turned out. If you and she hadn't fallen for each other so heavily it wouldn't have been nearly such fun. So now I'm

going, and you can go and sort things out with her, and I wish you both luck and joy.'

She turned away with a blind look on her face, as if she would not see what she had brought about, and went out of the room. A moment later they saw her go past the window with her coat over her arm accompanied by the dogs and a thick-set boy. She did not look into the room but they could see that she was crying.

'Did it never occur to you, not once, what it would mean to Julia when she found out what your work is?' Miss Hatton said, as if Catherine had never come into the room.

'No.'

'Didn't you know—hadn't you ever heard rumours among people who know her—about what happens to her when she comes into contact with anything about the atomic weapons?'

'No, I did not. I don't usually meet people who know her.' He hesitated. 'I was—I had never felt like that before about anyone. It was enchantment. I ceased to think at all.'

'I know. She does that to people. I love her, you know,' added Miss Hatton.

The pause that followed was filled with Keith's unspoken echo.

'What can we do?' he asked at last.

Miss Hatton shook her head, in a way that disturbingly said: 'Nothing' rather than 'I don't know'. In fact she was only wondering if she could persuade Julia to leave by the afternoon boat.

'She won't marry you unless you give up your work,' she said at last.

'How do you know that, Miss Hatton?'

'She said so. Over and over again, last night.' Before Keith could speak again, they heard the increasing roar of the

aeroplane's engine, swelling as the machine went over the house and then dying away as it passed out to sea.

'I must talk to her,' said Keith, and stepped, as he had done last night, over the sill of the window. Calmness had left his face, and Miss Hatton absolutely trembled at the vista of conflict and suffering opening before her.

'It won't be any use,' she called after him, not loudly but as if the words could not be held back. He looked round with an impatient smile, but did not pause, and frighteningly soon she saw him making his way over the rocks, and drawing nearer to the other figure wandering, clearly-coloured and small, beside the calmly-coloured sea.

Miss Hatton looked round the room without much of her usual dry composure, which had been badly cracked by the happenings of the previous night. She even put both hands half-way to her head in one of those gestures which are taught at dramatic schools to express distraction; they are also used in life. However, she did not complete the gesture, but swooped on a new number of *Flair* lying on a table, glanced at her watch and shrugged a little, then crossed to the bar and mixed herself a very stiff drink indeed. Thus fortified, she hurried back to her room even as a hermit fortified with Gospel and skull might retreat to his cave. There was nothing that she could do but wait; the worst of the ancient tortures, to wait.

Keith did not call to Julia, but when he was drawing near to her she looked up and saw him. She stood still in the pool in which she was wading and looked at him, holding her head and body as always, noticeably still, and he thought that this was how he would remember her; standing still, with waves or leaves or people moving restlessly about her; and then he realized with a shock that he was thinking about her as if he had lost her.

She began to come out of the pool, and the water slowly

relinquished its wavering images of her slender legs and her feet.

'Shall we stay here, or would you like to go somewhere else?'

'They can see us from the house if we stay here,' said Keith.

'Can they?' She looked back at the house indifferently.

'All right, it doesn't matter.'

He looked about, seeking a suitable place to sit down, but she had already settled herself into a hollow of the sands and clasped her arms about her knees; the small waves were breaking a yard from where she sat, and as she looked out over them her face began faintly to fill with the pleasure that comes when we sit quite close to a calm sea, and look low and levelly across its surface; sitting thus there is a feeling of closeness and intimacy with the enormous beautiful thing, and we forget its strength.

She looked up at Keith and smiled. He felt as if he could see clear through her body, her passions, and her spirit; as if she were made of the sea water; she was not pretending about anything nor hiding anything at all.

He seated himself on the sand at a little distance from her. He no longer felt as astonishingly close to her in spirit as on the night before; he was lonely again, and he wanted to break down as quickly as possible what was separating them so that they might come together.

'I am afraid last night must have been a great shock to you,' he began, gently and conventionally.

'It was a shock to you, too, wasn't it? I was like a woman in the Bible, a woman possessed with a devil, wasn't I?'

He reached out and took her hand. 'All I could think about was getting you safely home. And you didn't want me to touch you.'

She looked away from him. 'I don't want you to now,'

she said, but she let her hand lie in his. He looked at her eyes; they were washed wonderfully clear by tears, but they were dry.

'You know, it is strange how thoughts can change the appearance of what we see,' she went on, 'your hands don't look beautiful to me any more, because of the work they do; and neither does your forehead, because your brain lives behind it and works on those problems . . . and last night, only last night, your hands and your brow seemed so beautiful to me. It is strange.'

He looked down at the sand and did not answer. The conviction was creeping upon him that he was indeed dealing with one possessed.

'I keep remembering the Beast in the fairy story. He was my favourite hero when I was a child, because underneath all his ugliness he was good. But with you—with you——' she was grinding his hand in her own, as if trying to gain strength to thrust it from her, 'the story works the other way, because, although you look good, you're really the monster.'

'Julia,' he said, quietly interrupting the quiet words, 'does what I do really make all this difference to how you feel about me? Wouldn't we have felt the same way about one another even if you had known from the beginning what my work was?'

She shook her head.

'I would never have come here if I had known I was going to meet you. If it hadn't been for Catherine's trick (I suppose she hates me) I would never have spoken to you. Can't you understand? To me, you are the incarnation of war.'

'Julia, that simply sounds hysterical.'

'It is true,' she said, and turned away and looked at the sea. At no time had much feeling come into her low tones.

'I'll try to understand, darling, though it's very difficult. I see the situation so differently, you see. My work is my

work. I don't get emotional about it. Do you imagine that I gloat over its potentialities? What kind of a man do you suppose a scientist is? You seem,' he hesitated, 'to have got your ideas about us from the sensational press. Atomic research is not a horrific mystery to men who have been trained to work in it; there is nothing supernatural, or frightening, about it. The possibilities are terrible, of course, but no more so, I really believe, than those of any other weapon used on a very large scale. You don't really imagine, do you, darling, that at Lanwell we all creep about scared out of our wits? We live ordinary lives, like ordinary people, except that we are specialists and there are not many of us, and as the ordinary man and woman hasn't a clue to what our work is about, they tend to look on us as magicians. But to most of us it's a job like any other. Men with bees in their bonnets, like Nunn May and Fuchs, are the exception, not the rule. Do you not know, my dearest——' he gently put his big hand under her chin and turned her face away from the sea and towards him, 'that the kind of scientist you have been frightening yourself with is as out of date as earphones?'

He went on, gently presenting his case, with a simplicity that made her wonder why she did not weep, and in listening to the deep voice with its slight Scottish lilt she hardly heard what he was saying. With an occasional pause while he chafed her cold hands or hesitated for the word he wanted, he began cautiously to explain why his work was necessary in the international field; and why he felt none of the perverted scruples which had apparently influenced the men named as traitors. She began to hear names which, to her, were fatally associated with the self-deception of great men and the helpless suffering of obscure ones. Gradually, horror returned to her mind. She remembered—she, through whose imagination old poems and legends per-

petually floated—the story of the traveller surrounded by fox-men, whose human rescuer finally turned into a fox. Her love was speaking the words, and using the initials spoken and used, by those whom, throughout the world, she distrusted: NATO, UGTT, AIOC, OEEC, and as she listened, the hot light beat upon her face, and she breathed the conditioned air of the studios, and heard the too-considerate voices of the officials who feared that she might become hysterical or cause the programme to over-run its time by one minute.

Keith was not much interested in what he was telling her, because these facts were the commonplaces of his life, but he was concerned to the point of passion in trying to convince her that what he said was true, and he tried to draw up from himself everything which he felt about these problems and to send it out to her with all the sincerity he possessed so that she might (the words came into his mind naturally enough) see things more sanely. He ignored a suspicion that he had not spoken with complete candour when calling his work 'a job like any other'. He knew that, if he were not emotional about it, he was perpetually aware of its awesome nature. It called out in him the quality which in his religious forbears had been called out by speculations upon the Nature of God. He had never used, even to himself, the word reverence concerning his work, yet the word hung in his mind like a brooding cloud, and yesterday he had believed that he could one day speak of this feeling to Julia. Now, he knew that he could never do so. Even the words which he was now speaking seemed to change their meaning while crossing the short space between his lips and her ear, and she heard them as an idiotic and sinister gabble: he could read her response to them in her half-averted face.

The morning had been growing warmer while he talked, and now there was an abundant light in the sky which

promised at any moment to break out in the rays of the sun. No one had appeared to disturb their solitude, for this part of the shore belonged to Sir James's estate, and the road passing it led to the loneliest part of the island, where steep cliffs clothed in vegetation bordered a shore covered, to their very base, in large boulders. The oyster-catchers flitting over the rare pools and sands of the region were rarely disturbed by man, and the lack of natural beauty in the grey stones and sluggish waves beneath the matted cliffs was surprising. Few people cared to wander there.

As he talked, Keith had been increasingly aware, for some time, that what he said was having no effect upon her, beyond changing the sadness of her expression to one which he found less easy to recognize. He felt a growing discouragement. He possessed an almost feminine patience (a quality which was very useful to him in his work) but his strong logical sense found it exceedingly difficult to accept Julia's refusal to be convinced by logical argument. He had said with sincerity what he believed to be the truth, but she had responded as if he were talking nonsense. He was silent now, looking down at the waves almost touching their feet, while he sought for some other way of convincing her. His failure had made him feel that he was dealing with someone so irrational as to be actually dangerous. And he loved her.

'We shall be cut off by the tide,' she said after a long silence.

'Do you want to move?'

'No, we can get back over those rocks to the left.'

Having spoken, and ended a pause which had been growing increasingly difficult to end, she continued to look at him. The warm faint wind off the sea had blown colour into her face, which gave to it a look of health not in keeping with her strange expression.

'I came downstairs in the small hours to look you up in *Who's Who*,' she said at last.

'Did you?' rousing himself and sighing.

'Yes, after I was feeling better. You have nearly a column to yourself.'

'I believe so; yes.'

'You know you have. I was surprised. Not very surprised, because I realize that you must be outstandingly clever, but I was not prepared for a whole column.'

'Don't, please, Julia.'

'Love!' She quickly covered his hand with her own. She had grown pale and the dazed look had left her face. 'I was proud of you.'

He looked at her without speaking. Yesterday there had been a hope of happiness with her: it was strange to remember. What can I do to help you, he thought, my beautiful ill love.

'You are at the very top of the tree, aren't you?'

'I suppose so. It isn't a very tall tree, and, as I told you, there aren't many of us.'

'But you are at the top of it?'

'What does it matter where I am? If I were unknown it would make no difference to how you feel about my work.'

'It might,' wearily, 'but I don't know . . . yes, it does make matters worse, of course, your being so good at the awful thing.'

'It is no use, Julia. We are talking different languages,' and there fell another prolonged silence.

'And my work,' she said presently, turning her face to him and away from the sea, 'how do you feel about that? Do you hate it, as I hate and fear yours? My work is bent upon destroying yours just as yours means the death of mine. We are working for opposed ends, as if you were a soldier and I a nun. Our lives are not our own, are they? They are

not ours to do as we like with, because they belong to something else; yours to war and mine to peace. Yesterday evening I thought that my life was my own again. I was wrong. Peace, or God, or something of that nature still wants my life. Do you remember that I said our meeting might perhaps be a sacrifice? Now I know that it was not meant for a temptation, and I am beginning to suspect why we found one another. Perhaps soon I shall know.'

She looked again out to sea.

'It is nonsense to say that my life belongs to war,' he said, in a moment.

'What does it belong to, then, if not to that?'

He did not reply at once, for he was seeking words to tell her of the conviction, which was often with him, that his work lay in the very shade of creations' movement; that he toiled in an ante-room next to the primal energy. But before he could speak she said:

'Does it belong to me?'

'My love!' and he quickly turned to her, 'if only you would believe that it does! Why did you not ask me that before? Of course it belongs to you, all of it that matters.'

'Then, if your life belongs to me, give up your work for me.'

He stared into the dark face that was now, unbelievably, dimpling with laughter. She was pressing her pale red lips together so that their carved line was marred, and in her eyes he seemed to see a star, shaped like a snow crystal, focusing into a ray. It was so odd and so lovely that he lost, while looking at it, the power to speak.

'Give up my work?' he said slowly at last, as if he had not fully heard, 'you are joking, surely?'

She shook her head with a triumphant smile.

'No. I have meant to ask you ever since I read the column last night in *Who's Who*. If you love me, and if so much of

your life belongs to me, you will give up your work for me, and for peace. It will be a little sacrifice, my darling, on peace's altar. Mars will lay down his last and most awful weapon there. Can't you see the cartoons in the papers, on the day of our marriage and imagine what an effect your sacrifice will have upon all the millions all over the world whom I have been begging never again to make weapons and aircraft? Keith, you might start by your action such a flow of feeling that within six months there could be peace at last: true, undefiled by propaganda; peace without the accursed capital letter, such as the world has never known.'

He stared into her face, which was alight with the fire of her thought. The grey clouds had parted at last to reveal the sun, and a first silver ray struck down on the slowly rolling waves and a flight of silver birds went through it. His spirits grew lighter, for her laughing face and the sunlight together seemed to have driven away the ominous and brooding quality from the day. He did not even think it important to answer her seriously.

'It's a charming picture, dearest, but it doesn't convince me. I don't see it happening. We shan't change human nature by my giving up atomic research which, of course, I have no intention of doing, either for humanity or (which to me is more important) for you.'

He glanced upwards into the light: 'Look, love, here is the sun. Let us go for a walk inland, and, if you want to, we can go on talking.'

But he did not think, now that she would want to. She had been speaking for the last few minutes in a tone different from any other that he had heard from her. It was almost as if she had been mocking herself about her sacred work, teasing herself for imagining that she, one woman, could destroy war. She is getting accustomed to the fact that my work is what it is, he thought, but she will not give in with-

out a little more argument. She knows, of course, that I will not give it up, and she is going to accept the fact. The affair is almost over, thank God, and I have won her.

'So it's no?' Julia asked.

'It's no,' he answered without emphasis, while he looked round at the now sunlit horizon, 'you didn't suppose, did you, dearest, that it would be yes?'

'You're quite sure? Last chance.'

'Quite sure. Do you remember Lovelace's poem about honour?'

Her head was turned aside and she was opening the small canvas bag that hung from her shoulder. As she lifted the flap and slid her hand inside, he saw within it two of the white shells that she had collected yesterday with Catherine. The sun lit her face, where a smile of such beauty lingered that he stooped swiftly to kiss her. As he did so, she looked up.

'All right, then, my only love. This is for peace,' she said, and turned to him with the gun in her hand.

Miss Hatton heard the shots: first one, and then, after a pause long enough for someone to look at what she had done, a second.

She dropped her magazine and ran to the window and looked out; she saw only the sea ablaze in the newly revealed sun and nothing moving on the shore. She ran to the door and wrenched it open; she ran downstairs, and across the lawns, and stumbled over the rocks towards the sea, hearing voices and running feet behind her, but as she ran she knew that nothing she could do, now, would be any use.

The waves were breaking gently over them.

FOR THOSE IN THE DEPTHS

HE was a round-faced boy of almost seventeen. On this winter evening, he had chosen a seat further back in the church than the one he usually occupied, because he did not want the priest, standing at the door and bidding the congregation good night, to notice and smile at him.

David Poley had been coming to Saint Mark's for eighteen months; he had been confirmed there, and had taken his first Communion there; going every Sunday evening in spite of the casual jokes of those of his schoolfellows and friends who knew of his habit, and in the same way obstinately and faithfully rising at six o'clock, on one morning in each week, to attend the early service.

Why he did these things; why he, out of several thousand boys in the neighbourhood who never looked at a church nor thought about one, should take part in these rites which seemed to have no connection with his everyday, red-faced, laughing life, he could not have told if anyone had asked him. His parents gave a luke-warm approval to his church-going, although they themselves no longer attended. When the Vicar (newly come there, and rather despairingly making the few calls which were all that he could hope to make in a parish of some six thousand souls, of whom one hundred and seventy or so took their bodies to his church), had suggested that David come to a children's service and bring his younger sister, Mr. and Mrs. Poley had mildly encouraged them to go. The little girl had quickly tired of sitting still in the dim, lofty, building with the windows which she had at first hoped might be in Technicolor but which never moved, and had refused to go there after the second time.

But David went again, and had soon established the habit. When his parents asked him, with suitably prim faces, if he liked Church, he shrugged and answered that it was all right; and while he was being prepared for Confirmation some months after his first visit to St. Mark's, the Vicar had been slightly depressed by his failure to ask questions; any kind; even tiresome and impudent ones, about what was being unfolded to him.

Yes, sir. No, sir. That's right, sir, and hesitating but accurate answers to the set questions were all the sentences that came out of David's mouth during those half-hours in the vestry: where the stove, new in the year 1870, made the stagnant air pleasantly countrified by a whiff of hot oil, and cast a drowsy glow on the red tiles of the floor. The surplices worn by the continually-changing members of the small choir hung limply against the walls of pitch-pine, looking mysterious and sacerdotal in the dusk, and a wall-clock, older than the stove, ticked slowly and loudly in the silence. The priest was aware, on these occasions, of the dim, soaring, airy interior of the church itself, suddenly rising beyond the low door of the vestry; a step over that threshold, and the eye went straight up to the last faint light falling through the clere-story windows, or, if it were night, to search for some explanation of the sighings and creakings aloft in the vaulted dark; and the fabric of the building seemed to be anchored to earth only by the slender thread of consecration; gently rocking and floating at a mooring.

Then his mind would return to what he was saying, and his eyes to David's face—to which David never troubled to put more attention, interest, or respect than he felt. His instructor, for his part, felt that the boy was treating the preparation-time almost as if it were one more lesson to be got through; almost, but not completely, for something brought him punctually, on two evenings a week, to the

vestry door, and he did not miss one instruction during the three months before the Confirmation took place.

Careful questioning proved that he at least remembered what he had been taught, and when the Vicar thought of the loutish manner and half-concealed contempt of the few other boys whose girl-friends or mothers had persuaded them to submit themselves, David seemed an unusually satisfactory candidate. Yet the priest sometimes wished that the brightness of his eye could have been due to imagination rather than to health. He wished that there might have been signs that his soul was touched, for he loved David's soul, in the way known sometimes to good mothers and always to good priests.

When David was confirmed, the officiating Bishop noticed his look of perfect health and the kind expression about his mouth and eyes. There is more there than mere animal good-nature, there is an active power that could, by grace, be refined into loving-kindness, the Bishop thought, while giving his address to the candidates after the ceremony, and letting his eyes dwell impersonally upon each face. He did not speak of what he felt to the Vicar who had instructed David, nor to anyone else, because it did not seem to him worth mentioning; it only added to the priestly love with which he surveyed the rows of white-coiffed or carefully-brushed young heads.

Perhaps David went to church rather like a young soldier, to whom it is unthinkable that he should deliberately miss a parade, and yet knows parade for what he thinks it is, and has built up no *mystique* around it. Perhaps his nature needed order, and in the ceremonies in which he took part he found it. At least, when he stepped forth from the church door into the air after the service, he experienced a sense of refreshment, as he did after washing himself in the bath: there was an even narrower division between his body and his soul

than between those of most human beings, and, as he possessed only the rudiments of an imagination, his body—an unusually fine one—experienced the sensations reserved, in more sensitive types, to the soul.

There was nothing unusual about his life at home. For the past fifteen years his father had held the post of manager to the local branch of a multiple grocery store: he owned a small house which it had taken him twenty years to buy, and a rickety second-hand car, and his hobby was his garden. Mrs. Poley was a small, strong woman who enjoyed housework and cooking, and took as much unconscious satisfaction in the arranging of ribbons on the plaits of David's sister as she took in the making of a bed or the icing of a cake. Such beauty as there is in cleanliness, orderliness and comfort the Poleys' home had in abundance, and, each spring, there began that invasion from the garden into the house of astonishing living objects whose loveliness troubled the placid family not at all: the procession of sappy-stemmed, winey, cool-petalled flowers that burned itself out during late November in dahlias the size of dinner plates.

David was to be an electrical engineer, but as his training would be interrupted by military service, his parents decided that he should fill up the months between school and army by delivering the groceries at the shop which Mr. Poley managed. This was his job, on the winter evening when he took the retired seat at the back of Saint Mark's. He liked it, because it gave him plenty of opportunity to ride a bicycle, a pastime of which he was extremely fond, and it also kept him in the open air, which he preferred to being indoors. He was so strong that it did not tire him to bicycle up the high hills of the neighbourhood, laden with a large basket packed with groceries, until the ascent became so steep that he must dismount and continue on foot. He enjoyed seeing the different dogs and cats belonging to the ladies to whom

he delivered groceries, and the glimpses of pictures and ornaments in entrance halls which he obtained through half-opened doors. He was cheerful without being boisterous, and liked without being much noticed. His parents took his health and his excellent qualities of character for granted: loved him dearly and deeply, and never thought about their love.

On this Sunday evening, he had meant to rise from his knees the very instant after the Blessing had been pronounced, and hasten away into the darkness, because he did not want to meet the Reverend Mr. Sempill's eyes, and the priest would certainly choose this occasion to inquire of him once again if he knew of anyone, no matter how young and cheeky and small, who could be persuaded to sing in the choir. It did not occur to David that Mr. Sempill might read his trouble in his face; he simply did not want to talk to him this evening because he was a priest.

But just as David lifted his face from his hands, having lingered, in spite of his decision, because the peaceful echo of the Blessing on the air soothed him; and just as he was looking, with vagueness in his glance usually so direct and bright, at the altar whose silence and emptiness seemed to repeat the last words uttered there, the priest came swiftly down the nave with cloak floating behind him, and they looked at one another. The older man smiled and made the pointing gesture that meant he wanted to speak to David at the church door.

Slowly, wearing an obstinate expression, David followed him, and hung about in the porch while the scanty congregation, consisting chiefly of devout elderly women, slowly bade their shepherd good night. He was wondering whether to tell the Vicar what had upset him, and—an attitude unusual with him—could not make up his mind. He was not very troubled, but he was disturbed enough to

dislike the idea of talking, this evening, to a clergyman, and he had not received his usual vague refreshment from the words, and the hymns, and the dim glowing colours of robe and altar. But when the priest, turning away from the door as the last old lady carefully descended the steps into the drizzling darkness, took one look at his face and asked him what was the matter, David answered without hesitation that it was something he had read in one of the Sunday newspapers.

Mr. Sempill was exceedingly surprised. He observed that the blue of the boy's eyes had darkened to a troubled grey, and he strongly wanted to take the downcast expression from his favourite's face, but he was also interested to see it there: this was the first occasion on which he had seen David anything but cheerful and at ease. He had noticed a rolled newspaper thrust into the pocket of the boy's raincoat and now, without saying anything, he held out his hand towards it with fingers moving in the gesture one makes to attract an animal, and David, having first silently indicated some black headlines, handed it to him.

Mr. Sempill ran his gaze quickly down a page of large type, broken by sensational cross-heads, scattered with Czech, Austrian and Polish names, and illustrated by a drawing of skeleton-like figures dressed in rags cowering against a barbed wire fence. The text was hideous in its details, and both text and picture conveyed an impression that they were untrue. Why this was so, Mr. Sempill did not know. He did know, from other sources, that what was stated in the article was fact, and yet the comtorting illusion of fiction remained. Perhaps, he thought, it is the drawing; if it were a photograph, the things would sound more convincing. Yet he was glad that there was not a photograph.

He looked up from the paper, and met David's steady look. He saw that it was an accusing look, and he knew at

once what was the matter. But he did not know at once what to answer, for he had to defend Almighty God.

He stood silently for a short time, pressing the now folded newspaper against his open palm, and staring at the ground while he prayed. Then he looked up, and asked David if he did not read the newspapers regularly, and if he had had no idea that these labour camps existed? David answered that he read only the sports news and the comic strips, and Mr. Sempill felt a touch of relief and pleasure at this, because it was in character, and seemed to take them back into the sunlight of their usual interviews. Then David waited again, looking at the priest.

Mr. Sempill knew that it would take time to draw from him the accusation against God, and that bitterness and disillusion would be sweeping in, with the speed of a spring tide, while question and answer were being exchanged. He decided to go at once to the point, trusting that God would give the boy grace to accept the case for the defence.

It was chilly in the porch. The plaster walls were darkened, by time and smoke, to a deep grey and washed by the weak light of a single electric bulb embedded in the iron framework of a Victorian lamp. The wind rushed across the dark fields of Hampstead Heath and struck the church and made it shudder, lifting from the floor the edges of the broad, worn coir mat upon which they were standing and whining past the door half-closed against the night. Nothing in sight suggested that God was Love, except David's youth, which breathed hope, and the expression stamped by faith and works upon the face of the elderly priest. Perhaps some minutes had passed since Mr. Sempill had asked what was the matter. Now, being careful to speak naturally, yet not too quickly lest David should receive an impression of perfunctoriness, he began the speech for the defence.

He reminded David that man had been given by God the

power to be good or evil, as he chose. This was so, and Christians must accept it as a fact; if they did not accept it, or asked why it was so, much valuable time was wasted which could be better employed (here Mr. Sempill realized, with resignation, that one of his favourite sayings had insinuated itself into the homily). He hurried on, not waiting for David's answers, because he knew that it was of no use pleasing himself by forcing the boy to admit a series of logical points, each leading up to a God cleared of the accusation. What was needed was not logic, but clear, warming comfort. He went on to say that if the men who made the camps chose evil, they were to blame, not God. As for the people suffering in the camps, without doubt many of them were as greedy, cunning and cruel as those who had sent them there, and those who guarded them. The sufferings of those who were innocent (Mr. Sempill neither hesitated nor paused, but took great care that his voice should be charged with authority, for now the spear-point, the unwavering finger of accusation, was set against God's very heart) their fate was a mystery. The martyrdom of innocence had always been a mystery; perhaps it always would be, and Christians could only accept the fact, as they accepted the fact that God exists. Also, they could try not to add to the sufferings of the good by themselves doing what was wicked . . . and unimaginative, he added, taking a chance on David's understanding what he meant; lack of imagination was one of the greatest causes of suffering in the world.

His remarks ended (he had taken care that they should sound like remarks, rather than like a sermon), he stood in silence, looking down at the tips of the shoes protruding from his black cassock. He did not want to look at David's face, fearing to see upon it obstinacy and bewilderment. But he did not even have time to look up before David was

asking if there was anything he could do to help the people in the camps?

Then Mr. Sempill did look up at the electric light; it was in fact an irrepressible movement expressing joyful relief, but for a moment he thought that the bulb looked brighter; perhaps the power station was experimenting with the current. Then he answered that certainly there was something, David could pray for them.

The boy rolled up the newspaper and put it back in his pocket. He said nothing more, beyond thanking the priest, but the expression of his face was as usual. He said that he would be at church next Sunday, and said good night, and went off.

On his way home through the dimly-lit streets he whistled, and more than one old creature, sitting behind the curtains in a room not quite warm enough, heard the sound and the honest ring of his step on the pavement and felt comforted, there, at least, passed no cosh-boy or gangster. The pain that had ached within David since he had read the newspaper had abated, and he no longer wondered 'why God allows such things', because the priest had explained why, and the boy no more questioned the explanation, given by an expert upon his own subject, than he would have questioned an explanation given upon a mathematical or historical subject by the master in those subjects at school. If their authority had been questioned, he would have replied, unanswerably, that those chaps must know: after all, they were paid to. It was a rough test, but fair enough.

Now his mind was busy with how to begin praying for the prisoners. What would be the best time to do it, and what should he say? He did not pray at night or in the morning, and while in church he did not utter any prayers except those in the set forms spoken by all the congregation, and therefore the idea of prayers offered by himself, in

solitude, and perhaps outside the walls of the church, seemed strange to him. But no sooner had its strangeness entered his head, than it was followed by the conviction—so strong as to belong to the realm of feeling rather than that of thought—that to pray only on Sundays for the people in the camps would not be enough. He must pray every day. And his mind, busy and active as a young dog, darted off once more after the first question: what to say, and where?

At that time, experiments were being made in lighting London with the coloured lamps which now, seen at night in their thousands from some hill overlooking the city, give a creeping, sparkling prettiness to the black and sulphurous mass smoking below. The walker would turn suddenly from a street filled with livid lilac glare into one washed in burning orange or bathed in a dreary green, where the painted mouths of women appeared a dark purple and every face a corpse-like white. But these beams, which altered the human countenance so unflatteringly, marvellously transformed the buildings arising out of their gulfs of coloured air. The night stroller, looking at the near horizon from some narrow back street where the dim lamps erected forty years ago hardly pierced the gloom, would see the wider road beyond the houses as a glowing canyon, where walls, roofs and chimneys, of a softer and more subtle black than the older lights could ever contrastingly display, were outlined against a sky of sooty lilac or divine and theatrical dark blue. There was no solid black anywhere, either in shadows or in silhouettes, for the new light seeped in and stained everything with its unmistakably chemical radiance; yet the watcher, safe in his cramped alley, could feel lost in a satisfying dimness: free to do nothing but gaze and marvel at the transformation of his city.

David was interested in the new lighting because of its convenience for the motorist driving at night (he had begun

to put aside a little money each week from his wages towards buying a motor-bicycle) and he was absently studying, as he walked, the glow which burst upwards and stained the air, as if from some blast-furnace, above a bombed site veiled in dim yet glowing shadow. He saw, soaring out of the roofs that surrounded the wasteland, a church with no spire. It was one of those huge temples, deserted except for some sixty worshippers and the priest, which stand on the hills surrounding London: a shell once echoing with music and praise now left empty upon the shore by the receding tide of faith. His next thought was: that's an idea. Every time I see a church I'll pray for those people. I'll say (the words slid into his mind as if he were remembering them) *Lord, have mercy on those in the depths of despair.*

Satisfied that everything was now arranged, he walked more quickly, and only stopped whistling while he was passing the big church a moment later to say, for the first time, his prayer: not speaking it, even in a whisper, because a cinema stood next door to the church and he did not want the people in the Sunday evening queue to think he was talking to himself. He slightly turned his head as he passed the church, and *thought* the prayer towards it; with steadiness of mind, as if he were pouring liquid into a narrow glass. Then, hoping that it had already done some good, he turned down the road that led directly to his home.

When he was on his way up to bed that night, he saw the newspaper still in the pocket of his raincoat, which hung in the hall, and, with feelings quite different from those of earlier in the evening, he spread out the sheet for a last glance—not idle nor complacent, but rather wondering and earnest—at picture and text.

It then occurred to him that if there were more than one of these places—and the writer of the article spoke as if there were—it would be better, and more sensible, if he were to

pray for the people in one special camp, and thus his prayers would not be spread thinly over all the camps, but concentrated-like. And after some thought, and a study of the scanty facts contained in the article, he chose a place.

It was described as a smallish camp, situated in a barren and stony countryside. The prisoners there were of all types; people accused of treachery, spying, or political non-conformity; refugees, individuals who had fled before the advance of one army only to be caught between it and the advance of another, and a few soldiers. All had been pressed into labour at a nearby mine: their day's work was described, their scanty rations, and their punishments. As he folded the paper and put it into the box with the wood, ready to light the kitchen fire next morning, David had some idea, however dim, of how the prisoners in this place—his prisoners, as he already thought of them—lived. The name of their prison was Neusec. *Newsea*; he repeated it on his way up to bed; *Lord, have mercy on those in the depths of despair at Newsea.*

During the months that followed, he kept faithfully to his plan. Sometimes, when the day was unusually busy at the grocery and he was sent out several times with his laden bicycle, he would see the spires of the same churches on ten or twelve occasions from different points of view amidst the soaring and falling hills, and he never failed to steady his mind and send forth his prayer. But some system and method there had to be; he repeated it only on catching his *first* glimpse of a steeple. One didn't want to be praying half the day; besides, one had to keep an eye on the traffic.

When he was just seventeen, he found a girl at the local Youth Club and began to take her out. Her name was Jean; she was his own age, and rather serious and ambitious, but as she was also pretty, that did not matter. At her suggestion they joined another local club, whose members were interested mainly in politics; they also went once a week to the

cinema, and every Sunday evening she accompanied him to Saint Mark's.

It was early winter when they found one another, and both enjoyed walking through the cold air. But on their first walk together they were a little shy, and although they strode along briskly, asking questions and answering them, their uncertainty betrayed itself: neither noticed where they were walking to, and presently, having been unconsciously drawn towards an expanse of open ground with grass and trees, they laughed to find themselves in that part of Highgate Cemetery bordering the steep ascent of Swains Lane. They lowered their voices slightly as they marched up the broad path, out of consideration for the few figures in dark clothes moving slowly amidst the graves, but they could not lessen the red in their cheeks nor dim the sparkle in their eyes. Once, when David glanced away from her face, his eye caught the segmented green dome of Saint Joseph's church rounding out of the black and leafless trees, and he said his prayer, but with Jean beside him it was not possible to make his mind steady.

After this, this Sunday afternoon excursion became one of many jokes; their behaviour was perfectly decorous, but their eyes would laugh at one another, relishing the delicious lugubriousness of going for a walk in a cemetery. As the winter grew colder and the afternoons shorter, and people kept to their firesides, they were sometimes the only visitors there, except for the occasional figure of someone newly bereaved, who could not yet keep away. The sky curving overhead was a pale, cold blue, the ground curving beneath their feet pale and sparkling with frost, and on every side, rising slowly up the hill in restful frozen waves, the white and grey tombs and pink granite obelisks, cold in colour as the winter sunset, chilled and held the eye. Sometimes at the end of day the sun came out for a little while, glittering on

the naked twigs of the poplars and touching with gold the upraised finger of a pointing angel. These winged figures, weeping, praying, or staring pensively down at the graves, stood up amidst the sloping hills of white monuments, or were visible between tombs further off throughout the burial ground, seeming ready for flight, yet gently arrested in the very act, as if by ruth, or by the bitter cold. As for the spirit of the place, it was neither melancholy nor peaceful. It merely wore, as do the dead, the appearance of a mask. Near at hand, so near, must be something different, and true.

After they had been going to the cemetery for three or four Sundays, they suddenly, by mutual silent consent, ceased to go there and went instead to the football matches on Hampstead Heath.

When the time came for David to go into the Army, they had a serious talk, and arranged that if both still cared for one another when he was released, they should become engaged. The talk, the cautious yet hopeful peering into a future so far ahead as eighteen months, braced and pleased them both: frivolity was not in them, though laughter was, and neither shrank from responsibility. At eighteen, both had the soberness and good sense sometimes found in young people of twenty-five. Jean said that she would write to him (nothing so dramatic as a 'promise' was given, nor was it expected) and David entered the Army and was sent almost at once to North Africa.

There was only one Christian Church in the town where he was stationed, and he saw it only twice a week; when he went to Communion, and at Church Parade on Sundays. Thus his prayer, which he continued faithfully to repeat, was uttered only twice a week instead of seven or eight times in one day, as it had sometimes been at home. Amidst the novelty, the boredom, the absorbing companionship of other young soldiers, he still sometimes thought about the

prisoners at Neusee, and felt uneasily that they might have ceased to benefit from his prayer because it was now given less often. Twice a week, he suddenly decided, was not enough.

Would it serve if he prayed every time that he saw a mosque? There were plenty of *them* about, and his mother had always said that God was the Father of all and that everyone was going the same road home, no matter what their religions might be. It did not occur to him to go to Communion more than once a week: that would be overdoing it; peculiar; and he did not see himself calling down comment by saying prayers night and morning like some of the blokes did, but the next time that he saw a mosque, he said his prayer.

Lord, have mercy on those in the depths of despair at Neusee. The petition went out into the still, burning air, across roofs of white houses now stained deep yellow by the light of the setting sun, and even as David breathed it, the priest who called aloud from the mosque each evening emerged upon the balcony overlooking the square and sang forth his own praise. From that hour, David made intercession each time that he saw a mosque. Neusee was situated in a sandy country where the climate was rainy and cool, and the many lakes surrounding it were the breeding-grounds of thousands of wild fowl: how far away it seemed from this hot, noisy, ancient Eastern city. But no further, he sometimes felt, than his home in Andrew Road, Highgate.

When he arrived home, a few weeks before his twentieth birthday, life seemed to be unrolling before him smoothly as a carpet at a wedding. He had learned so much of his trade during his time in the Army as to give him a considerable start over other young men at the technical college where he now enrolled, and he was soon marked, by its Head, as one of the most promising pupils. Jean had grown an inch and a

quarter taller, and her face was bright and her movements brusque as ever, and she was still quite sure of herself except when she was with David: then, her cheeks glowed beneath her clear skin, and she was less talkative. She had not gone to church during the two years of his absence: her work as a shorthand-typist in a shipping firm, her dress-making classes, and the earnest preparation of the speeches which she delivered, to David's amusement, at their political club, absorbed most of her time and all of her imagination. They continued to go about together, but they did not talk about becoming betrothed. They took it for granted that they were 'going steady', and their families did the same.

The early spring shuddered by, in freezing wind and showers of sleet. A warm day seemed like a personal present. David had gradually ceased to make his prayer, as time went on, or he made it only as superstitious people bow to the new moon or avoid passing beneath a ladder, for his work at the technical school completely occupied his thoughts during the days, and in the evenings he was usually with Jean, in whose company he did not think about prayers.

One evening, the evening of a day which had marked the end of a spell of cruelly spiteful weather, they were seated in a small public hall near Jean's home, awaiting the entry of a lecturer.

The subject of his talk, as advertised in the bakery where Jean went to buy the family's bread, had aroused her fighting spirit by its title, *A Liberal Looks at Europe*. If there was one political party for which she felt not a shred of respect, it was the Liberals. She said that with a Tory or a Communist you did at least know where you were, but with your Liberals and your middle-of-the-roadees in general, you never knew which side of the road they were going to wobble over to: all this with the fine, sparkling earnestness of a young woman living in a country where politics is still

a game. On this particular evening she was sitting noticeably upright on the hard chair, with her hatless head cocked at a watchful and rather scornful angle, prepared to ask the speaker some pretty searching questions at the end of his talk. Beside her, in a more relaxed position, sat David, whose grand shoulders and good-natured face thatched with fair hair rather suggested the lineaments of a maturing young lion. He would have preferred a walk or a visit to the pictures this evening, but if Jean wanted to take a bash at someone from behind the Iron Curtain, he was willing to indulge her. There would sure to be a laugh in it afterwards, anyway.

The audience was sparse, and it wore an air of earnestness, rather than thoughtfulness, which almost succeeded in concealing its air of habitual bewilderment. The bright afterglow, pouring into the hall through the long windows, washed alike the dim wrinkled faces of the aged and the spotted skin of suffering youth; and the face of the lecturer shared the appearance, which this lovely light bestowed, of being forgiven. *Wait, it said, yes, I know, but all will be well.*

The lecturer sat with crossed legs and folded arms, surveying the hall under cover of the chairman's introductory remarks. Jean had always laughed at her mother's habit, when electoral pamphlets were delivered at the house, of judging the candidates upon their cast of countenance, but now she herself decided without a moment's hesitation that she did not like Dr. Potowoskoi. He looked as if he steadily over-ate. His expression was sharp and suspicious, and the shape of his head intellectual without being benevolent. Something dry, something burnt-out and exhausted, seemed to exist beneath that plump exterior. She decided that she did not, after all, want to argue with him during question time.

When the scanty rattle of applause had died away and

Dr. Potowoskoi had stood up, and in a quiet harsh voice began to build up in his opening sentence a joke too laboured to be amusing, more than one listener realized with dismay that the talk would certainly last an hour. The large, dry, sallow face up there had successfully damped their timid enthusiasm before a dozen sentences had been spoken. However, there would be lantern slides, and although they could not save a wasted evening, they surely could not be so tedious as what he was saying?

It was exactly what the announcement in the bakery had promised: that and no more. After he had given them a definition of Liberalism taken from works of some obscure thinker of the early nineteenth century, which lacked both colour and the power of being easily understood, he passed on to describe the swift decline of the spirit throughout Europe during the past fifty years: plodding, as it were, from country to country, and noting as he went the extinction of Liberalism's lamps with an unmoved eye which yet seemed, in some way, to assist at their quenching: *yes, that eye appeared to be saying, this is what we should expect, this is what we did expect.* The audience, however, was a little drunk on the first day of spring weather and it listened without outward signs of boredom; there was no fidgeting and no coughing. The hands of the clock jerked with yawning slowness across its white face, and the delicate radiance passed slowly out of the sky. Outside, the air became crossed and pierced by the liquid calling of two blackbirds answering one another among the chimney pots.

When the lecturer tapped sharply with a long stick against the edge of the platform to inform the projectionist that he wanted the first slide, the sharp little noise awoke David Poley from a doze. He was not a youth who easily gave a start, his nerves were too calm, and now he merely opened his eyes slowly, realizing that he 'must have gone right off'.

He looked at the speaker, and as he did so the lights dimmed, and the slide, slightly blurred in its black and white and looking, to an audience accustomed to the moving pictures, unnaturally motionless, jerked its way on to the white sheet and hung there, quivering. Then it was still. It showed one of the camps notorious throughout the world: the name was printed at the foot of the slide, and the speaker repeated it aloud. It hung in the air: the byword, mouldering and reeking, outcast for eternity. The syllables forming it could never be redeemed. The speaker tapped again with his rod, and the audience let out an uneasy breath. The picture had not been very bad, yet they wanted no more.

They did not get any more like that. He was only showing them signs of the destruction of personal liberty: illustrating his theme, not attacking any political party, not attempting to chill their blood and then heat it with indignation, warning them that the price of liberty was eternal vigilance. The next slides showed scenes at the Customs in different countries in Europe; photographs of passports, visas, permits for foreigners to work outside their own land, immigration officials 'screening' visitors, and scenes on Ellis Island. Then came a slide showing a forced labour camp; reproduced here, Dr. Potowoskoi said, by courtesy of an American magazine whose photographer had risked being shot to secure it. This—he turned to the screen and lifted the rod to touch it, while his dry precise voice pronounced the name—was Neusee. The rod touched the name printed on the picture's edge.

David's first feeling, as he stared curiously at the grey figures in sloppy overalls wheeling barrows amidst pine trees, was disappointment. These were the people for whom he had prayed during three years. They looked just like any other prisoners. He had seen hundreds like them, on the pictures.

He was staring with deep interest and attention at the slide when he heard the sharp small rap of the stick once more, and, as the slide jerked off the screen, the voice of Dr. Potowoskoi remarking that this camp had a special interest for himself, because he had once spent some time there as a prisoner.

David did not take his eyes from the speaker's face during the ten minutes which remained of the lecture. The idea had come to him that this man might be one of the people for whom he had prayed. His lips trembled slightly as he repeated, behind their gently-closed barrier, the sentence which he had uttered daily during three years of his life. To repeat it thus, surrounded by a crowd of people, suffused him with feelings which he had forgotten until this moment, but which had once accompanied every utterance of his prayer: the shyness, the reverence, the sly, sternly-resisted suspicion that he was behaving like a fool, and above all the strong and painful longing to help. All these emotions floated like thinnest mist above the placid groundswell of his everyday feelings, as he stared with steady blue eyes at the lecturer. He suddenly decided that after the talk was over he would go up and speak to him.

The final minutes were filled with subject matter dry indeed; the reading aloud of certain laws, affecting the liberty of the subject in matters of commerce, which had been allowed to lapse in England since 1914. There was nothing to be done about it, of course, the audience was thinking as the voice droned on: Government was Government, but it made you think. It was a shame, really.

The lecturer's voice ceased. He stood for a moment, looking with a dry expression at the clapping hands, then bowed and sat down. A feeling of anti-climax hung over the hall. The audience was unused to a speaker who put his facts forward and left his hearers to draw their own deductions;

it missed the colour of indignation and the roll of a peroration. People began to move in their seats, stooping to look for gloves and parcels and hats, and when the chairman, rising to thank the lecturer, asked if there were really no questions at the end of such an interesting talk, they paused only long enough to see if anyone were going to speak before resuming their preparations for departure. Slowly the hall began to empty.

Jean turned to David, wishing to imply that she did not want to remain there a moment longer, and was surprised to see him half-way down the gangway towards the platform, where the lecturer, standing almost at attention so stiff was his pose, was exchanging a few final remarks with the chairman. She followed slowly, knotting her scarf beneath her chin and wondering what David was up to now. Usually, it was she who got up to things. Perhaps there was a question he wanted to ask; she thought that he would never have the nerve to get up and ask it in front of all these people. Yet his nature was still lightly veiled in secrecy to her, because her own was candid and forthright. She thought him funny, in some ways; a funny old stick, and in ten years both would have to take care if she were not to lose the key to him.

But she waited quietly by the platform, with her clear eyes looking out from the frame of her scarf. The man's skin had a funny look when seen close, as if it had been dried up. David had reached the platform now, and was standing looking up at Dr. Potowoskoi and the chairman. The latter, catching sight of him out of the corner of his eye, turned slowly towards him.

'Yes. What is it? Can I help you?' Jean knew that he thought David only a boy: his tone, though kind, showed it.

'If Dr. Potowoskoi can spare a minute, sir,'—Jean was glad that David did not stumble over the name—'I just

wanted to ask him, was that right, what he said about being a prisoner at Neusee?' The name of the camp, too, he now pronounced correctly.

The chairman, an elderly rosy-faced man with a vague expression, slowly turned to Dr. Potowoskoi who was putting away papers into a worn leatherette case.

'Dr.—er—there is a young gentleman here asking——'

The Doctor did not look up as he answered. His swarthy face, bending over his task, looked ill-tempered and tired.

'Yess, yess,' he said, addressing David directly in an insolently soothing tone, as if speaking to a child, 'I was there. Don't you believe me?'

'Of course, sir.' David smiled, slightly and awkwardly. 'But I wanted to ask you about—the conditions there. Were they very bad?'

Dr. Potowoskoi lifted his head and looked at him. His bilious yellow-brown eyes held no expression except impatience.

'Bad? What do you mean by bad? They are bad in all those places . . . dirt, cruelty, starvation, the usual things. It was not one of the very bad places. There was not time, perhaps, for it to get very bad. Neusee'—he was adjusting the broken fastening of the case and did not look up as he spoke—'it was closed, and the prisoners sent to other camps in January 1946.'

January, 1946. But that was the year that he had begun to pray for them. He had said his first prayer—when was it?—in February 1946; early in February. But already the place had been closed down. Then his prayers . . .

The lecturer, having fixed the lock as well as he could and given a tiny shrug over it, looked up at David once more. David moved his lips: then said:

'Is that right, sir? Closed in January 1946?'

'You heard what I said.' Dr. Potowoskoi's glance had

become ironical. 'You seem to find difficulty in believing what I say, young man.'

Big, stupid, over-fed, thought Dr. Potowoskoi (but his mind repeated the condemnation mechanically) the type that sees its liberties slowly dying or snatched away before its eyes, and never notices, or lifts a hand to save them. He experienced the familiar intellectual passion of despair, known to those who adore an idea, whose only comparison is the *dry pan and the gradual fire*, yet that, too, he experienced as if from a distance. It was no use: it had all gone: all freshness of feeling and all inward conviction.

'Yes,' he said, 'the prisoners went to other places. The camp was deserted. It was never used for anything again. The wire fences were down and it was all overgrown. I know, because I saw it. It is near my—I used to live near there. I went back on a mission for my Government in 1949, and it was deserted then, and I was told that it had been so for more than three years.'

Then his prayers had been wasted. They had gone out somewhere, into the air, and had never reached the people they were meant for, because, while he was sending his prayers to Neusee, Neusee was deserted.

He stood with lifted head, looking steadily at a point on the dim wall behind the platform, and Jean looked at him curiously. He was so quiet, and it was not like his usual quietness.

Dr. Potowoskoi was coming down the steps, followed by the chairman. A man was shutting the windows, and two attendants were stacking the chairs at the side of the hall. Someone had turned out the lights near the door, and at once the air became full of gloomy shadows.

As Dr. Potowoskoi drew level with David, he looked at him again. He had thought of something that he could tell the big lazy fool.

'It is nothing much of a country, that part,' he said, his voice sounding as if he were punishing himself, 'sandy, not rich or beautiful. No use, you would think, except to the—people who lived there. It was part of the 'scorched earth' policy—at one time.' There was a glitter in his dried-out eyes. 'Are you fond of flowers? The English are said to love their gardens.'

David had turned to face him as he made his way down the steps. Dr. Potowoskoi had contrived to give the impression that he was merely throwing back, on his way out, a remark which had occurred to him: he was a busy man; he had other engagements; he took no interest in this young man or in England either.

'Not specially, sir,' David said, in his usual good-tempered tone, 'my father does a bit of gardening on the long evenings.' His eyes had a slightly bewildered expression.

'You seemed so *interested* in Neusee Camp . . .' the lecturer went on, moving down the gangway towards the door and speaking almost over his shoulder, 'and I have just remembered one thing . . . Interested in wild flowers, no?'

David, following slowly, shook his head in silence.

'Well, there was one new thing at Neusee that I forgot to mention, a thing I had not seen there before, nor in any other part of that country. There were such wild flowers all over the camp as I have never before seen equalled for colour and for size, even in the alps above Innsbruck. They were a carpet. Yes, they were a carpet. And it was not because dead bodies had been buried under that ground, because those that died were burnt or thrown in the lake; there was no time for burials in those days. So these flowers, coming out of such poor soil, were very noticeable. And that is all I can tell you about Neusee. Good night.'

'Good night. Thank you, sir,' David said.

Dr. Potowoskoi nodded, without turning round, and it

was a satisfied nod, as if he had enjoyed telling this English fool about some weeds which had nothing to do with the lost battle for liberty: they were all that the fool was fit to hear about. He went away down the hall, the quick fall of his patched shoes making an angry noise in the twilight, and the chairman, smiling and nodding good night to David and Jean, went more quietly after him.

Jean took David's arm and they went out of the hall together. His expression was cheerful again, and she did not worry him by asking him what he had wanted to ask that rude, disagreeable little foreigner. All the way home he seemed to be growing taller and more smiling, so much enjoying the sight of the new moon and the peach tree in scanty flower in one of the gardens in Jean's road, that at last she was struck by his look of health and peace, and pressed his arm close to her side, saying she was glad the nice weather had come at last.

MADONNA OF THE CROSSINGS

IN the early summer of that year, the figures for road accidents soared, as usual, and as usual very many of those hurt or killed were young children.

It was the fine weather and the long light hours of Day-light Saving that were responsible, as much as the motorists and the habits natural to childhood.

The children poured out of schools all over England: from gloomy, grimy old National Schools in the provincial cities, and from new National Schools in London with their myriad clear windows and cheerfully coloured walls; from the red brick Elizabethan schools in country towns, and the small, chapel-like schools built during Victoria's reign in the larger villages, came the laughing, shrilling, chattering swarms, bright-eyed and thick-haired as is no other human swarm; loitering, running, squabbling, leaning heavily upon one another's shoulders, with match-thin or sturdy arm looped awkwardly about the beloved neck of the moment's best friend: with bird-sweet voices or cries raucous as the yelps of small animals: wriggling and jumping inside the scanty bright dresses or the tattered shorts, the new jerseys or the old wind-breakers insisted upon by a cautious mother in case there should arise a sudden cold breeze; hatless, strung out in kite-tail groups and pairs and clusters outside the toy and sweet shops, and by the van of the ice-cream seller; sliding hopping, screaming, laughing or very grave, whispering, mocking—the citizens of the harmless world whose great men are Dick Barton and the Lone Star Ranger: the young children, let out of school all over England into the hot bright sweet summer afternoon.

Sometimes the stream dashes or winds slowly down narrow streets safely home to mother and tea. Four o'clock strikes, all over England, and the heads of millions of women turn towards the window, the gate, the front door: *in ten minutes, twenty, half an hour, she will be home. It's his late day, they have cricket on Fridays. She won't be in for another three-quarters of an hour, it's her music day.* The click of the gate, the passionate banging upon the front door by fists not yet comfortably able to reach the knocker, the breathy bellowings through the letter-box . . . it is the best moment of the day. The white cloth or clean newspaper is spread, and the kettle steaming, the lemonade iced and poured . . . the innocent food is ready to put into the round raspberry mouths . . . the sun of summer or the firelight of winter shines in clear eyes that take this exquisite happiness for granted, and it is timeless light, and this is the hour that lasts for so short a time, and for eternity.

Sometimes the stream of children, winding or dashing or loitering safely homewards, is stopped dead.

There runs the broad road where the traffic stands still, throbbing urgently, or darting and gliding with a swiftness strange in such massive, blunt-nosed monstrosities. Until they touch your body, the terrible hardness of these things is not realized; they are hard as rock; it is as if they were made to hurt human flesh; it cannot, imaginably, stand up to them. And this road is like the dragon of an old legend, or the tiger whose ferocity overshadows with despair the villages of an entire district in India; it is a 'black spot', notorious, named by the mothers of that neighbourhood with a sigh for past tragedy or with the quick, sucked-in breath of fear. The children are warned about it; they grow impatient under being warned; the attention of everybody within hundreds of yards of that dreadful and ominous river is uneasily aware that here is death, and worse—agony and cripplehood.

The children stand on its brink, warm and frail and grubby in their skimpy clothes, doing the road-drill taught to them as if brandishing a wooden sword in the muzzle of the tiger. But it is never safe to wade out into that awful river unless the traffic is halted, and even then a driver may be in a hurry or careless or bored or drunk. It is never safe, because only in the room where the cloth is spread and the tea waits is safety; there, while the children are with their mother, in the so-short hour that belongs to eternity.

'Mum . . . Mum . . . Mum . . . Mum.'

'What, ducks? . . . I'm buying no more lollies this afternoon. Ede, I like that blouse. Oh, I do like that. Dainty, isn't it. What, ducks?' The mother let her hand fall to her side where another hand, small and hot, slipped into it and hung on. 'Tired, are yer? Never mind, we're goin' in the bus soon.'

'Mum, the nurse . . .'

'Ede, it's on'y nineteen and eleven. Under a pound. Look all right with my grey, wouldn't it?'

'Shirley and me . . . Mum . . . Shirley and me, we was coming home from school yesterday. And you know that road, that road you said we wasn't never to go except we done our kerb drill . . . Mum . . . Mum.'

'What, ducks? Ede, I'm going to have that. Come in with me and see if they'll take something down on it?'

'Mum, there wasn't half a nice nurse. Me and Shirley was standin' on the kerb doin' our drill. And this nurse, she come along and, ooo, she was lovely. Like Nurse when she come to do my car. And she took our hands and she took us over the crossing, ever so nice and slow. All in the cars and everything.'

The twenty-four-year-old mother and her friend were strolling into the shop, whose double windows shimmered

in the spring sunlight with the reflection from a wall of white blouses, and the child of six followed, dolefully dragging her feet along the dusty concrete and worrying with one finger a tooth that was loose. She was not at all unhappy, but she thirsted for attention as a plant for water.

'Mum . . . can I go in Woolworths?'

There was no answer, and she turned slowly and dawdled out of the arcade. She squinted upwards and blew a puff of breath, sweet as a cow's, at the hair falling into her eyes, and saw, without seeing, through its glittering wheaten fairness the cloudless, brooding blue of the sky.

That happened in London, south of the river. About the same hour of early evening, in a city in the north, a van driver employed by a firm which manufactured chemical fertilizers was seated at high tea in one of the two small rooms that were his home.

'Ay,' he said to his wife, 'now peraaps tha'll saay Ah was rect to vote Labour. Know what they've got at all the crossings now? Guides to help the children safely across road. Ah saw one of 'em to-day, and when we was having a bit of a gab after dinner Davey Lang said he saw one of 'em too, over at Pike's Bridge where there's always been accidents. Mine was a tallish young woman in a kind of a blue uniform, walking slow and quiet, no hustling nor frightening the little 'uns wi' runnin' like a hen wi' the fits. She had one in each hand and two followin'. In and out of traffic, as calm as tha pleases . . . Ah niver a saw the like. Traffic all pulled up short for them, too. Another cup of tea, please, Mawther.'

'They trains them special for the work, Ah suppose,' his wife said, coming forward with the large brown teapot.

'Ah reckon so. It's a danged good notion, Ah say, and any

Government that takes good care o' the little uns gets my vote again, next time.'

'Get along with thee, Grandad. Tha niver talked like thaat about the little uns before Robbie was born. We all knows why tha's so fond of the children nowadays.'

The grandfather, grizzled and sturdy in his late fifties, smiled with grim sheepishness and slowly wedged under his moustache two substantial slices of bread, thickly padded with tinned salmon.

There were other and more critical observers.

It was on the 23rd May that the first incidents were noticed . . . or took place . . . it is difficult to express with precision what happened, because the whole story has that vagueness, so maddening to the trained mind, characteristic of myths stemming from the mind of the masses. The stories in the New Testament have the same wayward and self-contradicting quality, though the typical woolly vagueness is lacking.

I was asked by the Society for Investigating Psychical Phenomena to look into the legend (I suppose I must call it so) which swept England that summer. I work for them, from time to time. My qualifications are: a First in Economics and Social Science, a not-quite-so-good degree in Psychology, and a Ph.D.; an unusually reliable memory stored with facts likely to come in useful, and a congenital incapacity to believe anything unless I can apprehend it with my physical senses. (I speak of the obvious five; there may be others, equally physical but not yet scientifically classified which might enable an observer to apprehend phenomena in other ways, but until these are classified, I prefer to reserve judgment and rely on touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell.)

It was an irritating job. At least, I found myself becoming

irritated by it, as I got deeper into the investigation. There were no facts to go on—and I like facts. That is to say, I prefer an investigation in which *apparently* there are facts, for most of those which I have examined for the S.I.P.P. are characterized by a lack of them. But most of them have had more facts to study than the story of the tall woman, dressed in blue, who appeared at the city crossings.

There was no more to go on than this:

She had been seen at various crossings in the most crowded and dangerous areas. She was always leading by the hand two small children and often had three or more by her side. She never spoke to the children; some of them said that she smiled at them, others said that they did not see her face because it was half concealed by a blue covering.

She appeared to float out into the middle of the traffic, which always had time to pull up and avoid touching her or the children. There had been no accidents as a result of her appearances. She had been seen by more children than adults, but there were recorded cases of adults having seen her. There were also cases of her having helped older children.

Apparently the . . . appearances, I suppose that I must call them . . . had been going on for some days before they attracted public attention. Then two Irish sisters living in St. Helens near Liverpool (highly emotional types, as I recognized when I interviewed them later) got themselves into a local newspaper, the big dailies took it up, and the legend was started.

Their story was this.

They had been at home in their small house in a back street of the city, awaiting with anxiety (I suspect this of being an understatement; they were probably hysterical) the return of their daughter and niece, an eleven-year-old child who was attending a dancing class at some distance away, and who was riding home on her bicycle. (In passing,

it is interesting to note the extravagance in money matters displayed here, typical of the relationship between the parents and children of the masses. The total income of that household was under seven pounds a week, earned by the father as a railway worker, yet the child has a bicycle, and is taking dancing lessons. These deviations from the natural culture pattern into that belonging to a higher income-group are of interest only to the sociologist, and have no bearing on the record).

As the child, who was usually punctual, had not returned half an hour after her usual time, the two women became increasingly alarmed and were about to set out to meet her when she arrived. She said that she had had a narrow escape from being killed, and had gone out of her way to the church the family attended (they are Roman Catholics) to give thanks for her deliverance. She had swerved on her bicycle in one of the busiest streets of the city, and would have gone under the wheels of a lorry had not a tall woman wearing a blue dress or coat appeared ('come out all of a sudden' was the child's expression) in front of her and 'jumped her down' (the child again) from her machine and led her across the road to safety.

The woman vanished.

At this point the mother and aunt apparently fell upon their knees and proclaimed a miracle. There seems to have been much rejoicing and praying, in which they were joined by the father who now returned from work, and finally the whole family went off again to the church and told their story to the priests. A local reporter happened to be at the evening service (to me, this seems the most unlikely incident in an unlikely story) and the next evening an account of the girl's escape, together with a photograph of the crossing, the bicycle, and the whole family, appeared in the local paper. The account was emphasized by what the

press calls 'a box' and the headline: *Miracle in Motram Street?*

On the following day the most sensational weekly newspaper in Britain came out with a front page story, discrediting the whole affair, but nevertheless contriving to leave a doubt in the mind of the reader. It was cleverly done. The newspaper, which never loses a chance of attacking the Church, spoke of superstition and mass hysteria, and implied that those to blame were the Bishops. There were three interviews with divines belonging to different denominations, all of whom rather wistfully refused to commit themselves, and one with the Bishop of Ironborough (in a 'box') who stated that the question of a miracle having occurred did not arise because miracles, being against the natural order of things, did not occur. The paper ended by challenging the Woman in Blue to come forward and check the story before it spread. It also challenged any one who had seen her at the St. Helens crossing to get in touch with the newspaper.

I had read the account of the child's experience, rehashed from the original account in the St. Helens paper, and I now waited with interest to see what a spate of idlers, exhibitionists, and practical jokers would take up the challenge.

But to my surprise, and I am sure to the greater surprise of the newspaper, only six people testified. All were parents of young children, and all had either seen the woman in blue at a crossing, leading children through the traffic, or had been told by their own children how she had helped them.

But what caused the story, at one bound, to leap from the front page of the sensational daily on to the front pages of all the other newspapers—what inspired a second leader in *The Times*, and started the allusions on the air and in the music-halls was the fact that emerged from these six testimonies. (Or *appeared* to emerge. I am still not convinced.)

The letters came from districts in widely separated parts of England, and they stated (without collusion, as was afterwards checked) that the writers had seen the woman at approximately the same time: the rush hours, half-past eight in the morning or between four and five in the afternoons, when the danger on the roads is at its height. She could not by any human possibility, even had she travelled by jet propulsion, have been in six different places, hundreds of miles apart, at the same hour of the day.

The original newspaper at once sent its reporters to interview the writers of the six letters, and it was at this point that the S.I.P.P. got me on the telephone and asked me to investigate what promised to be as interesting a case of mass-delusion as the Flying Saucers.

I began with the railwayman's family at St. Helens.

The adults presented no difficulty. They were typical emotional, over-imaginative Celts, continually drinking strong tea (I refused not less than five cups while the interview was in progress) and introducing the name of God and other mythical conceptions into the conversation every few minutes. I heard what they had to say (more than once) and decided that all three were such untrustworthy witnesses that I had better dismiss their contributions as fact-providers, and question the child. And the child belonged to quite another type.

She was a short, sturdy girl with black hair and a red face, precocious in manner and seeming older than her eleven years. I got the impression that she cared for nothing but dancing; she exuded an air of over-mastering ambition. In ten years we may hear of her.

In these interviews which I do for the S.I.P.P., I try to suppress personal feeling as much as possible, and therefore reproduce the conversations exactly as they have taken place, and they are frequently revealing. I think it is clear,

for example, that this child was not what is sentimentally called 'a nice child.'

I quote from my notes:

Q. 'Did you see the woman quite close?'

A. 'It's rude to call anyone a woman. She wasn't a woman. She was a lady.'

Q. 'The lady, then, since you prefer the word. Did you see the lady quite close?'

A. 'Close as what I am to you.'

Q. 'What was she like?'

A. 'Don't know what you mean.'

Q. 'Well—was she like other people?'

A. 'Don't know what you mean.'

Q. 'Was there anything odd—unusual—about her?'

A. (After a pause.) 'She had ever such cool hands.'

Q. 'You mean that you touched her—or she touched you?'

A. 'Not exactly, I don't mean. I mean a kind of a cool feeling come out of her hands, like when you wash your hands under the tap in a heat wave with some smashing soap.'

Q. 'Cold hands. Anything else?'

A. (Falling into the trap.) 'I didn't say *cold* hands. I says they were *cool*. 'Tisn't the same thing at all, at all.'

Q. 'Now, how was she dressed?'

A. 'In blue, like I said.'

Q. 'What sort of clothes. What shape? Did she have a blue coat, or a dress of blue or what?'

(Shake of the head. Descriptive powers apparently baffled.)

Q. 'And she lifted you off the bicycle, you say?'

A. 'Not lifted me. Jumped me. With the two cool hands of her. It was all so quick-like. There was I, cycling along and starting to go a bit faster because I was a bit late and

they'd be crying out blue murder at home, and then an ugly old beast of a great lorry comes out at me. Sheila, says I to myself, it's the end of you—and then somehow the lady was hold of the two hands of me and I'm jumping down from my bike and then I'm standing beside it. But it wasn't like that, neither. Oh, I don't know how it was. Sure, I don't know how it was at all. But there was I, wheeling my bike across the road with all the traffic stopping for me and the drivers swearing and cursing out of their great mouths and I saw the lady's blue dress going ahead of me between the cars. Then I got safe to the other side and the lady vanished.'

Q. 'Now, Sheila, are you sure? Think, and answer very carefully.'

A. 'Sure I'm certain-sure. I saw her, as plain as plain. (*I don't wear glasses, like some people.*) One minute she's there and looking at me and I could see her face with the blue all round it, and then she's gone. And me with me legs trembling as if I'd done three hours practice of me dancing.'

Here the mother and aunt interrupted with noisy exclamations about miracles, and as I had got all the information from the child which she seemed to have, I came away. The unpleasantness of the child's personality in no way detracted, of course, from her reliability as a witness, which struck me as considerably higher than that of her relatives, and I am sure that she believed she was telling exactly what happened.

What did happen is quite another matter.

These investigations that I undertake for the S.I.P.P. are not well paid. If they were, the money would compensate for the boredom and irritation I endure in some of the interviewing. For instance, much of the collecting of scanty facts about the Madonna of the Crossings, as the legend came to be called, was done by questioning of small children. I definitely dislike small children and find them difficult to

handle. Nor do they like me. I suppose it may be my glasses. I try to assume a suitable manner, but I can only suppose that I do not succeed. During the next six weeks I became very tired of assuming a stooping posture and a beaming smile and gazing for what seemed hours into silent, under-sized red faces, often coated with a film of toxic matter, while proffering 'lollies' or sixpences (it would have been a penny when I was that age) in return for information.

Usually I got nothing more than murmurs about 'the lady'. But there was one interesting exception, a Chinese boy aged five, attending a school near a particularly dangerous crossing in the East End, who had been led safely (so he said) through the traffic at the peak hour by Kwan-Yin. Now Kwan-Yin is the Chinese Mother-goddess.

I questioned him through an interpreter; it made a change to stoop and peer into a dirty little yellow face instead of a pink or a white one; but I realized, after my first . . . well, it was a *frisson* of something more than surprise as the interpreter repeated the name . . . that of course the child's parents must have suggested that he had seen Kwan-Yin—just as the relations of the Irish child had suggested the Virgin Mary.

I interviewed more than a hundred children and some twenty adults during the six weeks that I was working on the investigation, but the facts collected from them were so few, and their impressions were so confused and alike, that it was not possible to draw any conclusions from them, and it was decided by the S.I.P.P. that I should confine myself to writing a brief account of the growth and development of this contemporary legend, without attempting to explain it scientifically. The members of the Society who read it (all our records are privately printed) could draw from it their own conclusions.

I was annoyed that I had not succeeded in isolating the

source of the legend, the germ of the infection as it were, and exposing it as a form of collective hallucination. But our President decided that if the investigation were to be carried beyond the sifting and arranging of the scanty facts available, 'a more imaginative approach' would have been necessary. I am not capable of that. Imagination is not my line of country; in fact, I dislike and mistrust it.

So I dropped the field-work and wrote up my notes. I am keeping the record as factual as possible. Actually, I've been amused to detect in myself a determination not to let the story . . . the legend . . . whatever you like to call it . . . get out of hand. I'm taking care to keep out of my writing any phrases that might touch the imagination of a reader. That blue garment for example . . . coat or dress . . . how scrupulously I have avoided the fatally suggestive 'cloak'!

You see, I am keen on truth. I want to see the sloppy mental furniture and habits of the average man replaced by observation, deduction, and conclusion, because I do not believe that day-dreaming and wonder-seeking are good for the human race. If all these legacies from our savage ancestors, these vestigial stumps left rotting in our minds, could be rooted out, we should be less thirsty.

What made me write that? Thirsty.

I should be less thirsty.

Throughout the short, warm, thundery summer the legend grew. After the first disbelief, and the activities of the learned societies which undertake investigations into happenings apparently out of tune with contemporary life; after the cartoons, and the jokes on the wireless and on television, had gone on for six weeks, all three instruments of publicity suddenly turned sulky and began to play the story down.

The press was the first to banish it to the back pages; and

later to three-line 'sticks' of news under one heading; and finally to an occasional letter from readers whose children had been helped, or who themselves claimed to have seen the Madonna. References on the air and television not only fell flat from the start, but received so many coldly disapproving letters from listeners and viewers that they were dropped almost as soon as they started.

But although the powerful disseminators of publicity and entertainment relegated the legend to the realm in which the Flying Saucers flew, the people of England continued to talk about the Madonna of the Crossings. Stories were passed from mouth to mouth by those who claimed that their child had felt the cool breath, rather than the touch, of her hands; or seen, as they sat at the wheel in a traffic block while petrol fumes made all the air shudder, the lofty figure in blue moving tranquilly amidst the monster wheels. They talked of her as much as they talked about the Royal Family or the Weather, and very soon, within ten days of her first appearance to the six-year-old Valerie Seager in South London, they were talking of her with veneration and love.

Many of the women (it was the women, of course, who first began to feel gratitude) did not completely believe that she was . . . who it had been hinted that she was. The habit of believing in any world, except that one in which they worked and worried, had been steadily declining during the past forty years; and although many of the oldest, and the youngest, of their sex professed religious belief, and even went to church, the Unseen World and those dwelling in it, were not real to them. Sentimentality had replaced the mysteriously clear statements of doctrine, and in the minds of many thousands of English women, the angels and the Queen and a favourite film-star shared an agreeably confused realm.

Most of them worked eighteen hours a day, switching

their clumsy skills every half hour or so in a way that habit had made automatic but no less exhausting, and it was not surprising that what they wanted from religion was the sweet, the easy and the vague. If they had been questioned about who or what they believed the figure in blue to be, most of them would have smiled embarrassedly and answered that they did not know, but mightn't she be some kind of a Sister, or nun, who got away quick because she didn't want to be thanked? God bless her whoever she was. Only the Roman Catholics, with joyful faces, answered at once and unfalteringly.

The Roman Catholic priests had at first spoken severely about what might become an irreverent attitude towards sacred things. It was only after the Cardinal Archbishop had made the famous reference in his sermon, preached on the Feast of the Assumption, that Romans could be heard cautiously admitting that England, during this summer, might have been honoured as no place on earth had been honoured since Lourdes . . .

Surprising facts accompanied the legend's growth. They were unexpected in the sense that they did not fit in with our everyday conceptions of human nature; for example, there was no hoaxing about the legend; no medical students or undergraduates appearing in procession dressed in blue; no exhibitionists presenting themselves in flowing azure cape near four o'clock on the busiest roads and hanging about to attract attention. And the brief duration of the cartoons and the jokes over the air has already been remarked. The small number of people who wrote facetiously to the Press about imaginary encounters with the legend's central figure diminished with each day that the legend persisted. But most striking of all the effects produced by this gentle, unhurried and unverifiable chain of appearances was the change in the habits of motorists.

It is true that this did not last.

For late in autumn, the Madonna of the Crossings was seen leading a child across Glasgow's smoothest and most murderous thoroughfare for what proved to be the last time. The 'appearance' was duly and tolerantly noted in the Press, and the hearts of the people turned towards her with love; and then, suddenly, it seemed, there was only a fortnight to Christmas, and there had been no appearances for two months.

But while she was from time to time in our midst, while we could never be certain, as we stepped off the kerb into the killer-river, that we should not find our shoulder brushing against that blue garment, there undeniably was a change.

It could be seen in the faces of the drivers while they approached the white bars painted across the road. It took them, this consciousness, in different ways. Some faces wore a jeering smile, others looked sheepish, some assumed an alert, don't-think-you-can-fool-me tilt of the head and gleam in the eye, while the women drivers tended to look impassive or eager and pious.

Pedestrians half-running across the road under the quivering or the frighteningly immovable bonnets of the cars found time to exchange smiles, and the troops of young children who occasionally launched themselves out into the danger never did so without drawing upon themselves every eye: you could almost hear the released breath of the watchers when they were safely across.

Yes, the people believed. 'Popularisers', skilled in simplifying the complex theories of contemporary psychology, might explain the nature of this hallucination in the Press and on the air, every two or three days, and their explanations, reprinted and re-broadcast, were read and heard over and over again by millions, but with little effect. And during

that summer the figures for death and injury on the roads fell to the lowest level ever reached.

The death of thousands of their citizens daily on the roads is not enough to make the British into careful drivers, said Pravda, still enjoying its occasional dig in spite of the warmer wind blowing Westwards from the Kremlin, they need a mass-hallucination.

'John, what use is a legend?'

'I don't quite understand.'

The two men, a barrister and a consultant in Income Tax problems, were driving out of London in the former's car to spend the week-end at the latter's house. They had been at the University together fifteen years ago and had married two sisters, facts which did more to explain their continued association than any similarity of ideas or tastes.

'When we stopped just now at that crossing it reminded me of the Madonna legend last summer. I hadn't thought of it for months.'

'Nor I. So much has been happening. But I didn't think much about it at the time. You did, I gather?'

'Well . . . either something took place or it didn't. If it had been a question of winning or losing a case, turning on the point whether those appearances occurred, I should have expected the evidence to convince any jury that they did.'

'You lawyers always expect human beings to be more observant and accurate and reliable as witnesses than they are by nature—or else to be dragoonable into having those qualities. You ought to come up against the types that I do—stage people and writers and minor cinema stars—people who couldn't describe an incident accurately if they were going to be shot for it. They can't even remember what they earn or keep any necessary papers.'

'Exactly, and that prejudices you against witnesses in the

mass. Your clients aren't typical. But getting back to what I said—what use is a legend?

'Meaning by 'use'?

'Does it have any practical effect on those who come across it—do any good, or any harm?'

'That depends on the legend.'

'Of course. But generally speaking?'

'None, I should say. People invent them because they want to invent them, and when they've got them they enjoy talking about them. Usefulness or otherwise doesn't come into it.'

'What about the R.C. legends about saints?'

'R.C.s don't regard those as legends—at least, only the more intelligent types do.'

'They have a useful effect as examples, I suppose—what the Victorians used to call 'edifying'. But is anyone the better for knowing about Robin Hood or King Arthur?'

'I should call those myths, not legends.'

The car pulled up before the forbiddance of a red light, and while it waited, throbbing almost noiselessly but with an effect of relentless impatience, the two men were silent. Their profiles were not truly alike, but contemporary anxieties and habits had smoothed each face into similarity: each looked clever and was clean-shaven, and neither had what he needed, nor knew what that was.

'Yes, I agree, on the whole,' said the barrister, as the lights changed and the traffic moved forward, 'I should say that the function of a legend, in so far as it has one, is to give pleasure to the sense of wonder, and that it grows up out of the mud at the bottom of human nature.'

'Your experience teaches you that human nature is mud at the bottom?'

'Of course. But what comes up isn't always muddy.'

'The Madonna legend? No . . . what I can remember

about that decidedly isn't muddy. Rather 'edifying', on the whole. And in spite of the uselessness of legends, the lady undoubtedly reduced the figures of casualties on the roads for a month or so.'

Both were shying away from the words *good* and *beautiful*. The tax consultant added quickly, as if shedding some burden of indecision and vagueness:

'There must have been a growing feeling for months among the proletariat that something had to be done about the deaths of children on the roads. Being unable to do anything themselves, poor devils, they started the legend of someone who could. It was a natural growth, as I see it, coming up out of a pretty bad need. It's odd—if things are bad enough, public feeling usually thinks up some mental way—an explanation, a legend, a dodging of the facts—to make the facts more bearable.'

'My own view exactly. If the need is great enough, something or Someone is provided to meet it.'

SPENDTHRIFT

'THANKS ever so,' said the girl in the train corridor, who was fair-haired but could not be described as a blonde, 'not that it's right to rob you really, but they're like gold these days.' She accepted a light for the cigarette. 'And where I usually go he hasn't had any not for weeks.'

She blew smoke expertly through her nose.

'Going on holiday?' she asked, her blue eyes dwelling on my face with a politeness which almost concealed the lack of interest. In her background family influence could be detected; she was paying prettily for the cigarette.

'Sort-of. No, not really. We're running away.'

'Oh. Them.' She glanced out of the window at South London sliding past, as if expecting to see a flying bomb poised over its grey roofs. 'They won't last. The boys are fairly queuing up to get at them. Doodle-bugs, they call them.' She spoke with authority, and this time her background assumed the storm-tint of R.A.F. uniforms. She turned her head and looked down the corridor. 'Say, it's jammed, isn't it? I expect you had to queue for hours for your tickets, didn't you? Me, I'm lucky. If you can call it lucky. I live just outside London. Carlton. Never heard of it, have you? Of course not, nobody ever has. But we get our fair share, now these things have started, and when the raids was on we had it for months or. end. Aircraft factories. (Careless talk.) No, but where do you think I've been?' She held up a parcel. 'Buying myself some new shoes. What do you know—they set me back four pounds. Silver kid. I bet there isn't more than another five pairs between here and America.' She swung the parcel by its string from her soft,

short forefinger. 'You know what happened to the last good pair I had? I wore them through; right through to the ground, walking over a very rough place, going dancing. Ever so wild up there, it is. They say there's rabbits, but I've never seen any. It's a kind of a hill with woods on it—what you can see from our house. You go down our road, left turn, along a road they've never gotten around to making properly, and then into a sort of lane. It's the quickest way to the dance-hall, over that hill.

'My God, it used to be dark. Mum used to be having kittens. Fact is, she said I wasn't to go. (I was on'y eighteen, see. It's two years ago now.) I don't like upsetting her, but I just *had* to.

'I'm very funny in that way. You ought to ask my friend. If-I-take-a-fancy-to a thing, or a place, then I've got to *have* that thing, or *go* to that place. And my friend was at this dance-hall almost every night. His camp was near there.'

She looked down at her cigarette.

'When I said my friend, just now, I didn't mean that one, the one I used to go through the wood to see. He, that one, he's gone.' She looked down again at her cigarette. 'I heard it, quite definite, through his pal.

'He used to worry himself sick about me in that wood with the rabbits. Now just you take care of yourself, Lily, he used to say. (Never called me Lil. Said it was common.) And then he'd start cursing the old war because he couldn't take me home himself.

'It didn't half used to be dark along that road under the hill, his side, after we'd said good night and he'd gone off back to his old camp or barracks or whatever it was. Dark! Why, there wasn't no light except the stars and you know what they are. Next to useless. Half the houses along that road the people was evacuated or bombed out, and as black as your hat. And that bomb-smell—you know. Some nights

there wasn't even the stars. And lonely! Believe it or not, one night I heard an owl creating; he'd got a mouse, or a mouse had got him, or something. Course, it's not long been started building, round there, between us and Southbury. There's fields and trees and all, and half the roads aren't made up.

'I used to go down that road listening to his footsteps until I couldn't hear them any more, and then I used to sing *Roll out the Barrel* to cheer myself up. Then I'd climb over a comic sort of a stile, and it would be all grassy and a kind of smell as if they had been cutting it. Only not quite like that, neither. Oh, it was a game. And wet! Some nights when the weather was ever so fine the grass would be wringing. I reckon there was a little "due" on it still—like the corny old joke—did you ever hear that song *The Foggy Foggy Dew* on the wireless? I used to get the hem of my skirt sopping and my shoes——

'Well, it was a funny thing about my shoes. I never would bother to change them. (Never bothered about coupons, neither. If you ask me, coupons were put in like the thing under the bed in that vulgar story—to make it more difficult. I could always lay my hands on a few coupons, if I felt like them.) So there I would be, tramping up the wet grass in my dance shoes, and then along a sort of little path in and out of a lot of prickly bushes. Yellow flowers, they used to have on them, and some nights the smell of almonds fair choked you. And then I'd come to the little wood.

'Sometimes there'd be a raid on when we come out of the dance hall, and he used to make me stay with him right up to the time he had to get back, hoping the All Clear'd go so's I wouldn't have to go home through the bangs. But I did, ever so often. You'll laugh at me, but it used to look quite pretty, all the coloured lights flashing in that little wood. Know what it put me in mind of? A Disney film. I'm very fond of Disney films. The little black trees—sort of

a pine, would they be?—and the searchlights and flares and all. And shrapnel! It fair used to rain the stuff. Many's the time I've stood under one of these little black trees with sopping wet feet, holding up my old pink taffeta—it's gone home now—out of the dead leaves and muck, and waiting till the clouds rolled by.

'You can see down into the valley from each side from the wood, and I used to feel ever so funny, up there all alone in my dance frock, with the old guns banging away and the houses all black and quiet down below. You could see them each time the guns flashed. I used to pity poor old Mum, and wonder if she'd do what she always said she'd do when I did get home—crown me. But she was always half-way down the road to meet me—ever so anxious and carrying on, and she'd have the kettle on at home and then we'd have a nice cuppa together and I'd take my shoes off.'

She looked down at her cigarette. The train was beginning to slow as it approached the bare gardens and pink roofs of a new suburb.

'I wore out—oh, half a dozen pairs, that year. I don't know why—straight I don't. Seemed as if I couldn't act sensible, Mum used to say. I used to *like* going in all that wet grass and dead leaves in my dance shoes. Seems as if I didn't want to save nothing, nor take care of nothing, not even myself, when my friend was going away any day into such great danger. And 'course, taking the short cut through that little wild wood, we had all that time longer together.'

The train drew into the station and stopped. The girl threw away the stub of her cigarette and opened the carriage door.

'This is where I get out.' She swung the parcel from her finger and smiled. 'Thanks ever so for the cigarette. And don't you worry about *them*,' cocking an eye at the sky. 'They won't last long. You can take my word for it. Bye-bye,' she said.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MEDAL

In the First World War a legend grew up that during the bitterest fighting in the Retreat from Mons the English soldiers saw the bowmen of Crecy, who fought at their side.

(Thomas Colmord, assistant to Thomas Walys, visiting doctor to the monastery called Vallis Florida or Vale of Flowers, is writing in the year 1366.)

Now will I set doune a strange thing that once I heard, so that there may be some record of it, although in these days, since the time of the Sickness, a man may not write any record or indeed set his hand to any thing and know that his children will read it after him or the thing he sets his hand to be finished, for the times are troubled.

In the first year of the coming of the Sickness, the year of our Lord one thousand three hundred and forty-nine, I Thomas Colmord of Dunster in Somerset, went in the spring of the year to the monastery called Vallis Florida hard by Dunster, with Thomas Walys, the doctor who visited the infirmary in those days to tend the sick, and one Walter Blok, who with myself did carry the fermacies of herbes and other gear. It was bitter cold that year, and ever and again the rain fell doune, and towards nightfall we came near to the monastery, hearing ever the great bell ringing without stint through the forest as the freres did toll it for those of their number that died hourly of the Sickness.

The way through the forest was foul and miry, for many had died in Dunster of the Sickness, and they had suffered the ways to be overgrown, therefore Walter Blok did go

before us and cut away the great boughs and the lytel and make a way for us, and suddenly hee stopped him and cried out, saying, There is one lying here that is dead of the Sick-ness, and Thomas Walys got him off his horse and did go to the man lying in the miry way.

Yewis, hee said, there is no stench of the Sickness here, and hee put his hand in the man his bosom and felt that his heart did beat and his flesh was warm, and we took counsel together, for the night was coming on and the wolves did begin to howl because of the spring and their great hunger. Master Walys set the man upon Walter Blok his horse, and so we came to the monastery at moonrise, and ever the bell tolled, and after some parley the freres opened the great gate to us and we went within. They feared lest the man should have the Sickness, for seven and twenty of the freres had died of the Sickness to that day, and Brother Matthew lay in the infirmary with his shoulder awry because he had lifted so many of the sick and dying since the Sickness began.

Thomas Walys parleyed with the abbot, that was named Stephen, and said of the man we had found, that he was but sick of a fever come from sleeping in the foul night air and the unwholesome dew^e of morning, and also hee was old and starved, and there was in his cheek an ancient wound that an arewe had made, and against this wound hee had sett the wool of a milche ewe (for the vulgar believe that there is a healing power in the grease of the wool to cure blood that corrupeth). Thomas Walys had studied with John of Arderne his leche-craft in the French wars and he told the abbot how such wool harbcurs all manner of filthinesses, causing the wound to breed venime, and even so this wound in his cheek was great as a Kent apple, and when we did lift him on to the horse (I mind me of this now) hee did shrigh out loud, so sore was the pain of his wound, though his eyes were closed and his wits away.

Brother Nicolas the Infirmaryman was a little man and old. We went with him together, Wat Blok and I, Thomas Colmord, bearing the man the twain, I bore his legs and Wat Blok his arms, and we were very weary, for he was a great man and heavy withal, and all the time his eyes were shut and we could feel the fever in his body as we carried him. Brother Nicolas the Infirmaryman said ever that the ewe's wool was a sovereign remedy against wounds, but Wat Blok swore by Thomas Walys his word and the word of John of Arderne, and so disputing we came to the Infirmary, a fair long chamber with windows of the new fashion, set with glass instead of horn or woven cloth to break the wind. We set the man upon a bedde, and Brother Matthew was there but others there were none, and it was about the third hour after sunset and the wind cried about the chamber but it could not enter, because of the new fashion of the window. And there was a fire in the room and we were snug. This I mind well and I mind how the great bell did toll without stint for the dead and there was the smell of the vinegar the freres did cast about the rooms against the Sickness.

It was about the fourth hour after sunset that Thomas Walys came with the abbot to look at the man we had brought in, as we sate at our supper of onions and mutton broth and white bread (this we had of the freres, as part of Thomas Walys his fee) and the abbot had a robe of *camelin de Tripoli*, wondrous soft and warm, about his shoulders and hee stood with Thomas Walys looking down at the man. Thomas Walys did show the abbot Stephen the man, his long arms and leather jerkin, and hee said, hee (the man) had been a soldier all his life and perhaps had fought him at Crecy field. I saw Brother Matthew listen when hee said this, for Brother Nicolas said ever that it was Brother Matthew his besetting sin to love to hear of battles and

valorous deeds. Hee too was a great man, and not old.

Brother Nicolas the Infirmarian spake up and asketh boldly about this matter of the ewe's wool, saying that he knew well and had known all his life that ewe's wool was a remedy for wounds, better than ventousing, because of the goodly grease in it. Thomas Walys waxed wroth and saith, Certes, in some sort it is a remedy for wounds, for if so be ye keep it against them in all its filthiness, in time will the man die and be done with wounds and all, but if ye would see him hale again and his flesh healed and sweet, then to the fire with your ewe's wool, and so saying hee put out his hand and yerked away the foul rags against the soldier his cheek and the ewe's wool also, and even as hee did so the man shright aloud and sat him up in the bedde.

Then we were all amazed, thinking him near to death, but he opened his eye (he had but one eye, the other being shut by reason of the venime that had runne into it) and he held out his arms and cried upon the Name of Our Blessed Lord because of the great pain that was in him and the fever also, and he shivered.

Brother Nicolas did runne to the fire crying out to save the ewe's wool that Thomas Walys had cast towards it, but Thomas Walys caught it from him and did cast it upon the flames and it did burn with a most foul stench. The abbot did laugh with Thomas Walys and did cast upon the soldier his naked body (for we had drawn off his hose and jerkin after the abbot had seen them) his robe of *camelin de Tripoli*, and Wat Blok did give him a drink of herbes to soothe his fever, and presently (it was about the fiftieth hour after sunset) hee looked at us and hee said, Who be ye? and hee said again, Pray for my soul.

Thomas Walys asked him saying, Whose soul shall we pray for? but the soldier answered not, for the fever was upon him again and hee only cried, Ah, sweet Jesus, and

shivered in the bedde, and the abbot blessed him and went forth with Thomas Walys, leaving his robe upon the soldier. (This abbot died that same year of the Sickness.)

Then it was that the rain fell doune again and the bell ever tolled, and we lay doune to slepe about the fire, I, Thomas Colmord, and Brother Nicolas the Infirmarian, and Walter Blok, and Brother Matthew and the soldier lay in the beddes. (There were but two score of freres left in the monastery in those days because of the Sickness, and none to tend the piscary, nor plant the herbes by the south wall, nor scrape the dung from the pigeon cotes and lay it upon the fields, nor tend the bees; all their days were spent in tending the sick and burying the dead and saying masses for their souls.)

So we slept.

About the ninth hour after sunset I, Thomas Colmord, awoke on a sudden from my slepe. The moon was going doune and shee shone through the glass in the window of the chamber and made gules upon the floor and the beddes. The bell had ceased to toll and the wind it had ceased and all the place was silent. But one was talking aloud in the silence, and that was what I had heard and why I had awakened from my slepe.

Yewis it was the soldier who was talking, and it was an unholy thing to hear, a thing not of God, that a man should talk thus to himself while all the world did slepe and the very bell that tolled for the dead was silent. I did lift mine-self upon mine elbow, but softlie, softlie, lest hee should look over from his bedde and see me, and perchance cry out or leap upon me, for he was full of fendes like those that did enter into the Gadarene swine, and it was these fendes that were talking through his mouth. (And yet they did right manfully speke out the Name of Our Blessed Lord as I will write, and surely never yet did fende utter that Name. But I will write.)

Now this is what the fendes in the soldier did say, in words here and there all whispered, and I, Thomas Colmord, did put them the one to the other and make them out into a tale, even as hee spoke them.

They said, in the voice of the soldier, that hee had fought at Crecy field even on that day when the bowmen of England did break the armes of the French and set them to flee, and there was much talk of his company, and of Jakin and Hugh and Dickon and Miles, goodly fellows all hee said (and I will swear on the word of a mercer that not a maid or a cok would have been safe within a mile of such good fellows, for such are soldiers, and alwaies will be).

In the days after Crecy field (hee said) hee went with his company to the north part of Flandres, sometimes fighting with the French and sometimes resting, and one day they had romed far after a fleeing band of the French and it came towards evening, and all was husht and quiet. They went on, seeking the waie to find the great company of the King his armes again, and the sonne was going him doune and the vapours beganne to come up, and they wished to find herbergeage. (Alle this hee saith, or the fendes in him saith.)

Presently it was night, . . . and after a long whyle they came to a place where there was a noise of battle and a storm of thunder together, sometimes they heard the thunder and sometimes they heard men shouting in battle. By Cristes swete tre (hee said) and sat him uppe in bedde, that was the most loud thunder that I ever heard, and so said we all. Then hee laid him doune again and cried sore with his wound, then in a lytel whyle he went on with his tale.

By Cristes swete tre (hee said), then saw we such a battle as never saw I before or since, spread alle about on a great plain, and there were monstrous great catapults that did send out fire as fast as man could tell his beads, with a terrible noise like to brast our breastes in twain. And Jakin cried out

(hee said), We are come to hell before our time, swete Jesus have mercy upon us all, and all the company cried aloud and gazed about them, and we saw men in drab jerkins and helmets of iron, with armes that were like a rod of iron that did send out fire with a lytel noise, and they were sore pressed, by the Body of Our Lord (hee said) they were sore pressed, and ever they moved backwards across the plain before the foe that beset them, men in grey jerkins and helmets of iron, and we liked not their looks. Then heard I (hee said) one of the men in the jerkins of drab call out upon the Name of Criste as hee fell, and so we knew that these were Christian men like ourselves. These be good fellowes and followers of Criste Our Lord, quoth Hugh, and they stared upon us in amaze but so great was the noise of battle that we spoke not.

Then spoke the fendes in him again, lying as is their wont, we saw (hee said) a monstrous thing that flewe in the sky, there were four of them that flewe with a great noise. They flewe in the sky (hee said). Hee said this thing many times, whispering to himselfe. Yewis (hee said) that this place we were come to was like hell itself and we were very afraid, but the soldiers in drab were hard pressed, ah, swete Jesus, they were sore beset, and ever the men in grey jerkins came upon them. Then did Jakin and Hugh and Ralph and Dickon and all of us (hee said) a goodly company of bowmen were we all, take counsel a lytel among ourselves and presently we did go in amongst them and stand by their sides, and we cried, Saint George for England (hee cried this aloud and sat him uppe in his bedde) and we fired our arewes into the men in grey jerkins, and those that we stood among did cry out in amaze, and some did laugh as if their wits were gone and called upon the Name of Criste, and ever they went back across the plain and we went with them, and we did send our arewes into the foe as we went.

Then the thunder and the lightning came again towards morning with a noise that bade fair to brake our breasts, and then (hee said) all of a sudden all was quiet, and each of us did look at his fellow and marvel, for the battle it had gone away, we knew not where.

Then he laid him doune for a lytel while and slept.

I marvelled much at what the fendes in him had said, and even as I marvelled the great bell did begin to toll again and the blessed sonne sprang uppe and did shine his light into the Infirmary, and Thomas Walys did come in, bearing fermacies. Hee asketh of me whether the soldier hee yet liveth. Verily, I said, he liveth and telleth of marvels. It is the fever in him that speketh, quoth Master Walys, and hee set doune the fermacies upon the floor and bent him over the soldier and feeleth his bosom. Then crosseth hee himself and saith, hee is dying. God rest his soul. And even as hee said this, the soldier did spring him uppe in his bedde and cry with a very loud voice, It was at Mons I saw these things, at Mons in Flandres, at Mons, pray for me, and even crying out so, hee fell doune and was dead.

All that he had said told I to Thomas Walys, but he saith that John of Arderne said that the fever filleth a man's mind and mouth with fancies and that it was alle the fever. But I, Thomas Colmord, have a mind to believe that it was the voices of the fendes that spoke through him of that hell in which they dwell for ever, and yet, if it were the fendes, how came they to speke the Name of Criste so swetely?

So I have set doune this thing that did befall to me, to ease my mind of it, I know not why it cometh to my mind so often and hath these twenty years. The freres buried the soldier in the great pit where they buried all those that did die of the Sicknes, nor did we find out where was his home, and what was his name.

DILEMMA

From: Hubert Kydd Chauncey, Esquire, at Mason's Hotel,
Cairo, Egypt.

To: Dr. Arthur Percarrow, D.Litt., at The Master's
House, St. Augustine's College, Oxbridge, England:
A letter written in a flowing and untidy hand and
dated April 18, 1843.

Sir,

I make no doubt that you will be exceedingly surprised to hear from one whom, no doubt, you never expected to see or hear of again.

After the disagreeability preceding my rustication eighteen months ago, and the decision arrived at by my guardians to continue my education on broader and more liberal lines by permitting me to travel round the world at my leisure, and the communication of this plan to yourself, I dare swear that you thought: And that's the end of *him*. Perhaps you may even have experienced some relieved feelings. No one can be more sensible than myself that our relations were never such as you, at least, would have wished them to be, and I am the first to admit that I did not add to their felicity by getting up to all those larks. But in the present circumstances (you will see what *those* are when you have perused this letter) I, at least, am ready to *Let bygones be bygones*, and I trust that you will feel the same. The fact is, you are the only person to whom I can write because you are the only person with whom I am acquainted who knows Greek sufficiently well. I am still amazed that I myself remembered enough of the lingo to recognize it when I saw it, and I remember thinking

to myself afterwards, *By Jupiter, Dr. Percarrow must have knocked more of the stuff into my thick skull than he or I realized and he must be an even greater Grecian than they think.* Which would be a mighty Grecian indeed. So that, Sir, is why I am writing to you to-night.

I believe I do not err in thinking you have never visited the Land of the Pharaohs? Or perhaps you have only done so under the guidance of *Herodotus* and other old boys of that sort? I mean no disrespect to you, or to the other masters of learning, but being just returned this day from a voyage lasting two months upon the lazy bosom of Mother Nile in a fifty-footer, with lateen sails depending from spars—confoundedly awkward to handle in a high wind—and having passed so much time amongst *Moslems*, half-naked *Nubians*, *crocodiles*, and *hyenas*, the academic shades of Oxbridge seem remote indeed. But I would wish to point out that in spite of Cleopatra and Isis and other ladies, Egypt, and Cairo in particular, is hot, dirty and wretchedly uncomfortable, and not all the balminess of the midnight air and the lustre of moonlight falling upon ruined temples can banish the smells and the flies.

The ludicrous thought has just occurred to me that you may possibly suppose, having read thus far, that I am addressing you in order to ask your assistance because I am in pecuniary distress. I hasten to assure you that this is so far from being the case that it is the *exact opposite*. I am writing to you because I know that *you* will be the one to benefit greatly from our joint venture. I have thought the matter over very carefully, and I have decided that we owe it to Humanity, Sir, to undertake this task, difficult though it undoubtedly will prove to be, and therefore I would beg you most earnestly not to lose even an hour in writing me your decision, nor any time in setting out from England.

When I shut my eyes, as I sit in this snug writing-room of

the hotel with the myriad sounds of the Egyptian night jangling outside the windows and mingling with the melancholy roars of the hyenas lurking in the tombs immediately beyond the city walls, I must confess I cannot be completely certain that what I saw in the crystal jar was, in truth, what I afterwards thought it must be. And now, alas, the difficulties attendant upon its recovery are great; so great, indeed that when you have perused what I have to say to its end, I implore you to think *very carefully and seriously* before deciding to join me in Egypt. I would not wish you to suffer the expense and fatigue of so long a journey in vain. On the other hand, I know you well enough to be certain—if it is what I think it is—that you will consider *any* expenditure of your valuable time—*increasingly* valuable, at your *advanced time of life*—more than recompensed by the staggering benefits to Scholarship and Humanity.

But to begin at the beginning. We set out early in February for a cruise down Father Nile, I and a companion, hoping to reach Abyssinia and the Mountains of the Moon, and get some sport on the way. As there is not much of a breeze along most of the great river, and certainly not enough to fill our sails for sixteen hours of the twenty-four, the crew (eight of 'em, and all villains) towed us along for much of the way by a rope, and you may imagine that during this tardy operation there was ample time for us to make off into the fields with our guns in search of partridge and quail. Sometimes we sauntered into some village of mud-huts, to quiz the natives and see what there was of interest (there is a vast number of old tombs and such stuff down there) while Abdallah, our dragoman, bargained for butter and eggs and milk. On these occasions it was the habit of the natives to offer us small rubbishy objects for sale; blue clay beads they had found among the tombs up in the hills, and small statues, often naked as Adam, without heads, and so

forth. Usually we refused their offerings, and when they became obstreperous a flick from my companion's hippopotamus whip speedily dispersed them. I record this in order that you may see there was some excuse for the fact that I did not immediately suppose it to be of any value (beyond that of gratifying idle curiosity) when I was, on one occasion and one only, offered an object of incalculable value. At least, I suppose that a *scholar* would think it of incalculable value, but I beg you to believe, sir, that *I* desire none of the benefits which may accrue to us from my discovery (if such it be). I want neither wealth nor glory nor fame. Certain circumstances—to which I shall not again allude—have conspired to render the World and its rewards dust and ashes to me.

All green and wildly fresh without but worn and grey beneath!

So wrote that Poet whom I reverence and admire above all other versifiers, and those words might have been written by myself, about my own life and fate.

By Jupiter, there goes the gong for dinner and I am hungry as a crocodile. I will continue later.

I have just read through (with some difficulty, for my head aches so abominably this morning that I have been compelled to wreathe it with a wet towel) what I wrote last night. In spite of bodily discomfort, a ludicrous notion flitted across my mind: that you, in your inexperience of foreign travel, might suppose a hippopotamus whip to be one meant for *whipping hippopotamuses*. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is a whip made from their tough and leathery hide. I cannot resist a smile, as I sit here wishing for ice and soda water. Some good fellows from the Fleet, now quartered at Alexandria, kept it up lateish with us last night, over music and wine, and I must have slept, for I do

not recall returning to my letter after dinner. I have not breakfasted nor do I feel the need of any breakfast.

I will not weary you by relating at length the details of a voyage whose calmness speedily became monotonous, although for you, as one untravelled, such details as purple Nile geese, wild dogs, camels, and buffaloes toiling at their water wheels, might possess the charm of novelty. I will not take up your valuable time by writing of the thousand and one picturesque crafts which hourly throng the bosom of Father Nile; such as bee-hives being floated down the stream in search of fresh flowers and pastures new, and rafts constructed from frail clay pots and jars and pipkins, upon which their vendors sail at their own sweet will. You will not want to read of slave-boats, or our encounter with a maddened *timseach* (you will not, perhaps, know the meaning of this word; *timseach* is a crocodile) nor of the strange fishes, unlike any seen in English waters, which we daily drew from the bosom of Mother Nile for our own amusement, and I will pass over these odd and quaint items.

Day by day we floated on. The landscape was tedious to a degree; brown hills, green banks bordering the river, yellow sands beyond, and every now and again a miserable cluster of mud huts inhabited by jabbering natives. We became so accustomed to the monotonous landscape that sometimes on awakening it was difficult to believe that we were not back where we had been yesterday.

I mention this fact because it has a bearing upon the difficulties lying in wait for us (I refer to you, sir, and myself) should we decide to set out together. The fact is, all the shores of Father Nile, from Cairo down almost to Philae, look so much alike it is deuced hard to tell one from t'other, and we took no note of our surroundings beyond what was necessary to the day's progress. You may suggest that perhaps it might be possible to recall whereabouts we were by

identifying some lofty column or shattered temple, but, upon my honour, there are so many of them down in that part of the world that it would be useless to attempt the task. And although I feel that it is our duty to attempt it, it will be a deuced, hard, long, hot, weary task, and I have no doubt that before it is done we shall both be abusing the day we set forth upon it.

After we had been some three weeks on our way, and were heartily tired of sands and muddy water and the caterwauling of our crew as they tugged us along or rigged the sails to catch a precious capful of wind (making more of a to-do about it than a British tar would of a naval engagement) we drew in to shore late one afternoon opposite one of the myriad small islands dotting the watery bosom of the river, between a palm-fringed strand and a mud village on the bank. There was a great bustle and going to and fro of the crew as they anchored the vessel and set up our tents for the night, and in order to avoid it and to see if we might not wing something savoury for dinner, my companion and I landed on the island in search of wildfowl. It was (or rather it is, though it so closely resembles a hundred others between here and Philae that I am sure I should never recognize it again) a muddy, sandy, lonely place with tall palms sticking up out of thick-growing river foliage, and, like many others boasted a small ruined temple, its columns painted all over with blue and red manikins and beetles, lying half-buried in the bushes. There was a dark doorway leading into the place, and my companion went towards it to peer within, while I followed at a slower pace. Suddenly there was a great splashing and to-do in the water near at hand, and I glanced about, suspecting the presence of *timseach* (you will recall the meaning of that word) or perhaps, forgive the jest, *hippopotamus*.

However, what emerged from the water was no monster

of the deep, but a group of young African girls, clad like our First Mother only in their long tresses. My companion uttered an exclamation of impatience and beckoned me towards the ruined temple, but I was (confess it) attracted by the picturesque group as it hesitated timidly half-immersed in the wavelets, and before I could follow him they had surrounded me, and were holding out their rubbish, chattering shrilly as they implored me to buy.

I wonder if you can picture the scene? No doubt you recall my personal appearance well enough to have no difficulty in crowning my sun-darkened countenance with a *tarboosh* and draping my form in the snowy robes of a Muslim (we had adopted native dress as being more comfortable and suited to the climate). Picture my fair(?) companions, snub-nosed, black as ebony, and chattering like perroquets, and group us upon the golden sands beneath the blue skies of the Egyptian noon. 'Twas a scene to tempt the brush of a *Turner*!

Beads were their chief merchandize, and beads even less than usual worth the few farthings which such things customarily fetched. I dismissed the fair vendors good naturedly but decidedly, and was turning away when I noticed an unusual object being held out to me by a girl standing on the edge of the group.

I approached with some curiosity, and made to take it from her with the intention of examining it more closely, but although she was willing to allow me to look at it as it lay cradled in her hands she would not allow me to touch it. It was a jar, not large and of pleasing shape, and made of some transparent substance which I took to be crystal. *It appeared to be of the greatest antiquity.* It was unlike any mug or cup or similar object that I had ever beheld in England, and, upon reflection, I dare swear that it was never made in our age of gaslight and railways.

I examined it—idly, I fear. I can imagine with what

mingling of interest and growing awe you, sir, would have approached it, but I am no *Grecian* and have never laid claim to be.

Nevertheless, the object was so unusual as to arouse my curiosity, sharpened by days of gliding through scenes totally void of incident or diversion, and in a moment I observed that the object was *hollow*. Then I perceived that there was something inside. I peered more closely, endeavouring as I did so to reassure the shrinking owner by uttering, in a commanding tone, the few words of Arabic which I possess, and I saw that the object was a scroll resembling parchment, and that there were small signs, of a darker brown, upon its surface.

Now, sir, we are close upon the matter to which this long preliminary has been approaching. I recognized those signs. They were Greek. Nay, more—I recognized some of the words upon the scroll. I do not wish to imply that they were familiar to me, in the sense of my having read them in some book; I mean that I *read* them, as I would the daily newspaper. But I fear that I cannot write them here, because I have forgotten them. They were what I would describe as of a high-falutin' nature, and that is all I can recall about them. The scroll was thick, and I imagine that what was written on it may have been a speech, or exhortation, of some length, but at the time my chief emotion was one of amazement that so much Greek had remained with me from my painful sessions at Oxbridge, and I am very sensible of what a disappointment it must be to you that I cannot remember what I read.

What followed must, I fear, be a greater disappointment yet. It now became plain to me that the African girl had never intended to do more than show me the crystal jar, and that it was not being offered for sale. Having jealously permitted me to study it for perhaps three or four minutes, she

suddenly withdrew it with a quick movement from my gaze, and, before I could prevent her, sprang into the lake and began swimming rapidly back in the direction of the mainland. I watched her thin black arms rising and falling through the water, and saw the crystal jar, held in her right hand, flash each time as it caught the sun, but although I repeatedly shouted to her (for I now desired to purchase the jar as a curiosity) she paid not the smallest heed. On reaching the shore she made off rapidly into the trees without turning round, and I was compelled by my companion to join him.

In the evening the girls were sporting again in the shallows of the mainland, but amidst such a profusion of snub noses and woolly heads I completely failed to distinguish the owner of the jar, and my attempts to question them concerning her and it (though I devoted some time to the task and even employed *dumberambo* to make myself more plain) were without success. The next morning the girls ran away laughing as soon as I approached, and, except for glimpses of their black faces impudently contorted with glee peering at me from behind ruined columns and the trunks of trees, I saw no more of them that day. The following morning we turned our vessel about and sailed off on our return voyage to Cairo.

I must confess that I did not immediately realize that the crystal jar might contain an object of interest to scholars. I thought of it merely as a curiosity, akin to those miniature wooden ships contained in bottles, the carving of which occupies the leisure of retired sailors. But when we were once more afloat and once more insufferably bored by the monotony of life on the bosom of Mother Nile, I began to puzzle about the jar and its contents because I had nothing else to think about, and finally came to the conclusion that the scroll was an Ancient Greek one, perhaps a speech of Pericles or Sophocles or Sappho or some other of those

genuine *Grecians* over whom I used to pore at Oxbridge. And that, sir, was what gave me the notion of writing to you.

I feel certain that you cannot have perused what I have written without considerable agitation, and I can only hope that it may not have proved *too much* for a constitution already enfeebled by constant study and the weight of years. If I have harmed you thus unmeaningly, I can only express my regrets and beg you to remember the difficulty of the situation in which I was placed. Reflection convinced me of my duty to acquaint someone of the existence of the scroll, but when I attempted to convey to my fellow-traveller the probable importance of my discovery, I could get nothing from him but impatient mirth, his knowledge of Greece being confined (so he informed me) to a horse named Aristotle which had once lost him a considerable sum in wagers and left him with a strong prejudice against Greece, Grecians, and all. So you will realize the dilemma in which I was placed.

A disturbing notion has just crossed my mind. Do not ancient manuscripts, when exposed to the influence of the air, instantly crumble to dust? And would not this probably be the case if, having traced, purchased, and brought home our prize, we should then unseal it? It would indeed be a sharp disappointment if this should be the end of all our hopes and plans. I beg you to bear the danger in mind before you decide to up sticks and away, and do also remember how vast the expanse of sand, Nile water, marsh, ruins and rocks, extending between here and Philae, which we must explore before we capture our prize.

I shall be here for another month and then, hey! for Syria, and a month under canvas with my former companion and our guns. But letters addressed to Mason's Hotel, Cairo, will doubtless find me.

My own idea is that the scroll was enclosed in its crystal

coffin by one of the old anchor—what you may call'ums who once lived in caves in the desert. Perhaps he found it, and wanted to preserve it. Was there not once a library that was burned, at Alexandria?

I remain, sir,
Your humble servant and former pupil,
HUBERT KYDD CHAUNCEY.

THE TIME OF ROSES

‘HULLO.’

‘Hul-lo!’

A pause, while the two young men, one elegant in Neo-Edwardian drainpipe trousers and short overcoat, the other too confident in his own brilliance to trouble about elegance, exchanged surprised greetings. Then they exchanged slightly wry smiles. The wryness was slight because they were now so successful (I had recognized both from photographs in the press) that they could afford to drop the open rudeness which, early in their careers, had terrified people into giving them introductions, meals and jobs. If I had not been watching them closely, I should not have seen what they thought of my old acquaintance Mrs. Floyd’s party.

‘How did you get here?’

‘Bus, tube, bus, and a ten-minute sweat up a bloody great hill. How did you?’

‘Taxi. But I didn’t mean that. The man lost his way.’

‘I’m not surprised.’

They looked, with slightly more open superciliousness, round the room.

‘I say, this isn’t at all bad,’ said the dandy, sipping with retrospective surprise, ‘what does she put in it?’

‘Herbs off the Heath, probably.’

Another pause . . . I could have been described as *the woman in the grey hat, sitting on the sofa*. I had taken trouble with my appearance, because Mrs. Floyd likes her women guests to ‘dress’ her parties (although most of them are too old, and too poor, to do so, either to please her or their own vanity). But the young crystal eyes of the dandy and the

brilliant boy swept over me with less attention than they were giving to the wallpaper.

'Great God . . . peacock-blue walls and black walnut furniture,' said the latter pensively. 'Is that fringe, or cob-web, on that lampshade? (No, not *there*, dear—over there in that corner, where Something is sticking to the armchair . . . oh . . . it's *alive* . . .) And—do you see what I see? Pouffes. *With tassels.*'

'It's like the *décor* for the *Madwoman of Chaillot*.'

'It's pure Cocteau.'

Both took freshly-filled glasses, at this point, from a tray being slowly carried past them by one of my hostess's Old Faithfuls. She muttered something to the dandy as she paused before him, and he, to my surprise, smiled and said something in reply.

'*What was that?*' The brilliant one pounced, delighted to relieve the tedium with a little malice. '*Good afternoon, Mr. Roger? Don't tell me you're a frequent visitor here?*'

'Not "frequent". But Mrs. F. knows my mother. They chased lacrosse balls together at the same school about forty years ago.'

'That can't be why you're here?'

'No, it isn't. But why are you?'

'Me? Oh, it's too long a story, but it seems that some time between-the-wars Mrs. F. wrote a best-seller, and there has been talk of filming it.'

'With you to do the adapting?'

'Exactly. She cashed in on that, and invited me, and I couldn't get out of it . . . And now, dear, why are you here?'

'They must be hard up for scripts.'

'They are. *And now, dear, why are you here?*'

'Not to adapt anything,' said the dandy, and he smiled, quite unsuperciliously, and then I saw Mrs. Floyd's niece

Sybil, who looks like an intelligent lotus flower, crossing the lofty, dark and crowded drawing-room, where elderly people were moving slowly between the pools of dim light cast by heavily-shaded lamps. The dandy waved to her, and she came over and joined them, and he presented his friend. Then the three tall young creatures stood in a circle, each slowly turning a silken head poised upon a smooth neck to look round the room, and their faces were alight with inward laughter.

'Now,' said the brilliant young man to the girl, 'you can tell me who everybody is. Who, for a start, is *that*? (No, of course I can't point.) The one wearing the balaclava, who appears about to raise the siege of Stalingrad at any minute?'

'That's old Miss Hayes. She suffers with her ears . . .'

'You need not say "old", each time, dear; we will take that as read. And the one with the twitch?'

'Sir Arthur Vernon. Have you read his poems, *From an Ancient Lute*?'

'I have not. I read no one's poetry but my own. And the sprightly floozie in the sky-blue pill-box?'

'Dorothea Lennox. She writes children's stories.'

'Then most of those present, I take it, "do" something? Write or paint or (God help us) act?'

'Most of Great-Aunt's friends do. But there are one or two of them here, of course, who don't do anything, except just——'

'Live?' His eyes smiled at her, under the sweep of hair concealing half of his high white forehead. 'But how many of them do that? Just look round, dears; just take a long, sober, reflective look about you, and answer me, frankly and thoughtfully. Is there anyone here this afternoon (ourselves, of course, excepted) who is alive?'

Perhaps the triumph in his tone was a little too strident; at least, the smile slowly, doubtfully, faded from the girl's

pink oval face, while the other young man let his head droop until he stared down at the dim indigo pattern of the Persian carpet on which they stood, and neither answered. To me, the tone was extremely cruel, but then, I was on the other side of the fence between youth and age; only just over, yet irrevocably so; and I saw twitches, and ear trouble, and sky-blue hats above wrinkled faces exactly as they were.

'For instance,' the blond genius resumed, in a tone now sharpened by real dislike, real distaste, as if, by showing the ugliness of its objects, he meant to destroy any traces of pity which might be flawing his companions' hearts, 'that old mummy in spats who's just sat down on the sofa next to the woman in the grey hat—can you, honestly, call him *alive*?'

The low, carrying voice was perfectly produced and now it was edged by disgust. With extreme discomfort and vicarious pain, I heard every word. I did not stir. To move, to glance uneasily at my companion, would have made matters so much worse that I hardly dared to breathe, but sat, hands crossed in my lap, letting my eyes move easily, interestedly, about the room while my lips grew stiff in the curve of an amiable smile.

The sofa upon which we were sitting was pressed down at its far end by the weight of the man resting there. More by guessing than by actual sight, for I did not dare even to glance down at my own hands, I saw his legs, stiffly extended before him and covered in shiny brown cloth which hung about their thinness in folds. The fawn spats, emphasized by the boy, half-covered a pair of brown shoes patched at the sides and shining like new chestnuts. Presently, now laughing again, the three young people moved away.

In a moment one of the women with a tray of drinks paused in front of us, and, turning to take one (which I needed) I not only saw my companion's face, but was addressed by him, on the subject of the drinks and which

kind I preferred. When we had made our choice, and were again sitting in silence, I retained a most vivid picture of the face at which I was no longer looking; its long, square shape, deep yellow tint, and forehead high as that of the young genius who had condemned it. The mouth was set in lines of firmness which time and age seemed to have made mechanical. The grey eyes, which must once have been large with youth, were dim under drooping lids. My companion was noticeably shabby and noticeably well-groomed; his shirt looked like thin snow against his wrinkled neck, his dry hands were white.

Presently he said something polite about the party, and I, not too eagerly, agreed. We went on to the news of the day, turning so that we faced one another in our corner, and soon I was gently receiving more impressions. If a negative characteristic can be said to convey personality, then I would say that *his* most noticeable quality was a lack of animation; a woodenness; a deficiency, as the boy had said, of life. Yet his manner was neither self-conscious nor nervous, and after we had been talking for a little while I realized that he was something which one does not care to mention aloud nowadays in public places: a gentleman. The fact explained (so I thought then) why he had been able to ignore so successfully the appalling remark which we had overheard. Or had he not, after all, overheard it?

His remarks, scanty in quantity and colourless in theme, were noticeable only for their lack of the self-absorption often found in the talk of old people, and again I thought that this was accounted for by his breeding. But there was another quality in his way of speaking which I found less easy to place. Formality? Self-effacement? I could not fit it with the precise word. Yet, if one listened and watched with unobtrusive attention (as I am fond of doing) one detected it, and it added a faint flavour to the stiff, dry, dull

front which he presented that afternoon to the little world of old acquaintances gathered in the Hampstead drawing-room. I decided, rather to my own surprise, that he had been used to unusually 'good society'; far better, in fact, than the best now in the room.

But when he had finished his drink I saw that a certain look about his rigid mouth, which I had seen settling there like a faint shadow since I turned to face him, had become more marked, exactly as a bruise comes out after a lapse of time upon hurt flesh. I wondered if the alcohol, in warming his thin old blood, had also banished the numbness which often freezes the emotions of unusually sensitive people after a blow . . . and, frankly, I hoped that he would not start really talking . . . I did not want to hear an attack upon the manners of modern youth, leading by way of the degeneracy of the public schools to the problem of the cosh-boys, and, determined not to be thus embarrassed, I resolved to leave. I had got so far as putting its glove on to my left hand when, with sinking heart, I heard him speak.

'My hearing is still good.'

I simply ignored it. It was going to be too painful: I could not bear that look about his mouth; and I busied myself with pulling on my second glove while staring idly about the room. Then he spoke again, and although what he said was so unexpected as to provoke my interest against my will, it also carried the sinister marks of a question which may lead into morasses of boredom.

'Do you know the Black Sea—at all?'

'No——' I was quickly, but not ostentatiously, arranging my veil, 'is that the one . . . which one is that? There are so many little seas down there . . .'

'The Aegean, the Sea of Marmora, the Ligurian, the Adriatic,' he said, and for the first time his face creased in a smile that showed false teeth too large and too white, 'no,

the *Black Sea* is between Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria and Roumania. I lived on the shores of the Black Sea once, every summer, for six years.'

'Did you? How interesting,' I now had my gloved hands resting on the bag in my lap; I was sitting upright, with my veil freshly arranged over my nose, and if ever a woman looked on the point of departure, I did.

'When I was a young man, yes. Before 1914.'

Those two incantatory words, which by their mere sound can summon up what is loosely, and yet truly, called a vanished world; words which grow increasingly strong in compelling, nostalgic power as our contemporary world reels deeper into barbarism; those words performed their usual spell. I turned to him—and found nothing to say, because the flushed and inexpressive face was marked, faintly but unmistakeably, by emotions which had risen from the depths of its owner; risen so often, and so many times been denied expression, that now they were only shades, mere ghosts of feelings—but ghosts, like those once feted in Ancient Greece, who were hungry for expression, even as those were deemed hungry for oil and honey and wine.

'Yes. From nineteen hundred to nineteen hundred and six. I was tutor to two boys, the sons of one of the kings down there.'

It was said without humour. I suppose that to a young man who has got his ideas of Monarchy from the last days of Queen Victoria, when England ruled the waves and the world too, the kings of the Balkans would naturally seem small fry indeed. I leaned back against the curved support of our sofa, keeping my face towards him, and murmured: 'How very interesting,' dragging the small lure of the word in front of him more as a sop to his formal good manners than for any other reason—for it was as plain to me as if he

had said so, that he meant to feed his hungry ghosts on my attention and, since I had seen them in his face, I was content to foot their bill.

'That is my profession. I am—I was—a private tutor.' He put two thin yellow fingers inside his coat, and brought out a card-case whose thick silver gleamed blue in the lamplight, 'but of late years I have been coaching boys for the public examinations. Very stupid they are, too. I have noticed a swift and steady decline in intelligence and power of application since the nineteen thirties.' His tone was pedagogic and cold. I looked at the stiff white card he was holding out to me. *Mr. Jocelyn Allen*. An unusual and romantic Christian name for such a dry stick. It must, surely, have influenced his outlook and his conduct? I felt certain, at any rate, that it was a *Christian* name; that it had been marked in water upon his brow in a Church, and not merely entered on a birth certificate in some town hall.

He returned the card to its case. 'Yes, boys were cleverer, before 1914 . . . even boys who belonged to ordinary families. My pupils, the sons of the king, were both clever; the elder, Alexander, perhaps the cleverer of the two. They were little chaps when I first went to them, rather solemn and shy. It wasn't a good life for boys, you know; too much money, not enough sense of their responsibilities and duties, too much—how shall I put it? They were beginning to grow up too quickly; that was what struck me first of all about them, and there were too many women in their lives. Not that——' he made me a little bow, 'I mean any discourtesy to your sex. But Alexander and Boris (Boris was the younger; I made quite a decent bowler out of him, in the end), were beginning to need a man to keep them in order and to give them manly interests. Their father didn't care about them, you see. There were all kinds of reasons for that, and then their mother was perpetually meddling and

intriguing in the political affairs of the country, and *she* looked on the poor little beggars as—er—pawns in the game, if I make myself clear? And she had no end of ladies-in-waiting and women friends who all had a finger in the pie, too. So the boys had no one, really, no one who honestly cared how they grew up. But I was able to help a little, after I went to them. I have always been glad about that.'

His fingers went inside his coat again; this time, they brought out a case, worn and shabby and with the gilt missing from the initials in one corner, but made from fine leather and, like his card case, most carefully tended. He took from it some letters, with the rubbed creases and faded ink of such relics, written in the spidery hand of the Continent and having a signature of Royal clearness and size.

'Boris kept in touch with me until fairly recently . . . nineteen thirty-seven in fact. Then there was an assassination—you may remember?—and a "purge", as they call it now, and many arrests. I haven't heard for over fifteen years, though I have written more than once.' He replaced the letters carefully. His lips moved, then he stilled them, and there was a pause before he again spoke. I thought he might have been going to say that he would have liked to go down to his Black Sea, to find what had happened to the favourite pupil, but could not afford the fare. However, he said nothing about that.

'It's a long time, I suppose,' he said in a moment. 'Fifteen years—although on some days I don't feel it so.

'We three became great pals. I taught them to play cricket—a straight bat, and no stabbing the bowler when he got you out, and I persuaded their parents to let them take long walks with me. That got their weight down (their mother and her friends were always giving them sweets). And we went climbing together, in some of the easier mountains. I believe in plenty of exercise; always have.

It gets rid of a lot of trouble . . . and I was twenty-six in those days, and never tired.'

He broke off again. The room was still full, for Mrs. Floyd's guests did not enjoy so much social life that they could afford to leave a party before they had sucked from it the last drop of entertainment, but no one was taking any notice of Mr. Allen and me. I suppose we did not look as if we 'did' anything. I waited: in the pause I expected, at last, some reference on his part to rheumatism or failing powers. Up till now, almost the most surprising absence in his narrative had been just this. But none came; he only took up his monologue again, and now there had come into his voice a change. I kept still; I neither looked at him too intently, nor uttered those occasional appreciative murmurs which urge on the natural bore, but which can dry up the sensitive talker, driven by the need to confide and to recreate, like a sprinkling of dust.

'Every summer, we used to go down to a palace on the shores of the Black Sea. It was small, and made of marble, and the grounds—by Jove, they were magnificent! Full of all sorts of rare shrubs from the mountains, and jolly flowering trees, and lots and lots of flowers. There was a wall round it, shutting it off from the little port a mile or so away . . . sometimes, do you know, when I am thinking about that little port, I can smell it; the fish, and the strong tobacco the chaps smoked down there, and the incense in the old church . . . though not all of the smells were so pleasant, of course. But I never took the boys there; we kept to the gardens and the bathing beach below the palace—half a mile of it (private, of course) and the swimming—I've never seen such sands. We used to play cricket on them, and fish from a boat. Oh, there was plenty to do. But I kept them hard at their books, too. We never slacked. I drew up a daily programme and we stuck to it.'

People have often interrupted themselves, while relating to me a tale whose interest is greater for them than for me, to ask the question to which there is but one answer: *Does this bore you?* I did not expect Mr. Allen to ask it, and he did not. As his story unwound itself through his severe and withered lips; while he now hesitated over how he should approach and tread upon what I was increasingly certain was holy ground; and now paused to find the simple comparison which should convey to me with precision what he was seeing with the eyes of his heart—he knew, I am sure, that he could not possibly be boring me. And my only fear, now, was that our hostess or some other fool would come up and interrupt us.

‘We used to go down there in early summer. When we arrived, driving out in the carriage (no cars in those days, remember) from the little railway station twenty miles away, there would be all the staff, bowing in front of the palace in their bright clothes and all the roses would be in bud. It was smothered in roses, climbing up the columns and round the windows and growing along the terrace beds. I’ve never seen so many in one place; the chap who designed the garden must have liked them. All summer, we were never away from their scent, and the petals covered the marble terraces like coloured carpets. The boys used to rustle along in them as English children do in autumn leaves. It’s strange, you know . . . while I was living there, I took the roses for granted, in a way; but since those days, after it was all over, I have often thought how unusual the place was. I suppose that one might call it romantic. I liked it very much down there, with the boys and the open air life and the feeling that I was doing my duty. The only disadvantage was that sometimes it was lonely. There was no one to talk to, after the boys were in bed (and I didn’t encourage late hours; bad for their health). There were the servants, but of

course one couldn't talk to them. They were more decent types than those at the court in the capital; the king had chosen them, I believe, from among the mountain tribes who were most loyal to him, but they were like all those Balkan peoples; knife you for tuppence—or even without, if they happened to feel like it, and I did not trust any of them. So I just had to put up with my loneliness—or solitude; loneliness is too strong a word. But I found myself looking forward almost too much to my sister's letters from home. It wasn't until a . . . visitor . . . arrived at the little palace that I realized how lonely I had been.

'The last summer we ever spent there was unusually hot. By George, the roses were magnificent. The heat was so intense that they only lived for about a day after they were fully open, and overnight the gardeners used to sweep the fallen petals away. When I was sitting out after dinner, with a book and my pipe, in a kind of little summerhouse which I had rather a fancy for, at the end of a terrace, it was so quiet that I could hear their brooms pushing roseleaves along the marble paving with a sound like the sea on the shore below.

'One evening, I was sitting there as usual, when something made me look up from my book, and there was a lady coming down the terrace towards me under the lattice roof covered in climbing roses. The sun had set, but the sky was still pink, and it made her white dress and her coat look the same colour as the roses overhead. Ladies had a great deal more hair, you know, in those days, than they have now, and they dressed it so as to display it; this lady's hair was arranged on the top of her head in curls, and I remember thinking how the load of it made her face seem small, and that it was the same colour, a sort of silvery gold, as the moon that was rising over the sea. I got up, putting down my book and slipping my pipe into my pocket, and then——

'She spoke charming English. With an accent, of course, but not much; just enough to make what she said sound more charming. She introduced herself. If you will forgive me, I will not tell you who she was, because . . . but she told me that she was the youngest sister of the king, and that she had been living in Paris (that was why I had not seen her at court, in the capital) and that she had now come back to her own country. She was going to live in the capital, and take up the life of the court, and I gathered, even from that first conversation, that she did not want to. She had come to the little palace for a last holiday, as it were, because she had stayed there every summer as a child and was greatly attached to it.

'She sat beside me on the marble seat, and we talked about London. It seemed so strange to me, I remember: she had been to a match at Lord's. She asked me questions about cricket. When her lady-in-waiting came out to us, some time later, and we three walked back to the house together, I wondered how I had ever put up with my loneliness before they came.'

He looked down at the gloves held between his hands for a time. Then the dry voice droned on:

'We had . . . some very happy times together. The boys were delighted to see their young aunt (the Princess was only twenty-two) and the next day, I remember, the day after her arrival, we all went riding together, the boys and the lady-in-waiting (she was some twenty years older than the Princess, I judged, and very much more worldly, more experienced) and she and I. And then, in the evenings, we played and sang; oh yes, I sang too. I had a fine baritone, in those days. Every evening, after dinner, she would lead the way to the music room and we would try over the German songs and the Old English ones . . . *The Golden Vanity* was one of her favourites, and *The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington*.

I had to explain to her what the unfamiliar English words meant, and where the places in the songs were. She had such a pretty voice; not strong; a *voix de salon*, but I have never heard one to compare with it for sweetness.' He paused. 'And all the time, the roses were coming into flower; endlessly; overnight, so that when we pointed out the buds to one another while we walked in the gardens each evening, we would see them fully open when we walked there again in the early morning, before breakfast.' Again he paused. 'It was a happy time. Very, very happy. Speaking for myself, I have never felt like that again. And never before, of course. My life up till then had been ordinary. And since then it has been much like other people's. But during those two months, while she was there, it was not ordinary at all.'

The silence that followed was the longest that had yet fallen between us. He was looking down at the limp gloves which he was slowly stretching and plucking between his knotted hands. Suddenly he lifted his head.

'She did me the honour to love me,' he said, and he uttered the word, perhaps more often profaned in this age than in any other during the world's history, without hesitating, and he looked me in the eyes, almost fiercely, as he said it.

I knew that he was deliberately casting aside habitual reticence; telling me a fact which—I could hear it in his voice—was as much a part of his daily life as his poverty. That note of wonder, which I should have expected the circumstances of his story to bring into his tone, was simply not there, and that was the instant at which I realized the truth and strength of what he felt. He was not dwelling on a memory. He was living in the love of a lifetime.

The gilt French clock on Mrs. Floyd's mantelshelf struck the half-hour, and he glanced at it; half absently, and half with the expression of the unpractical scholar who has, with

much effort, trained himself to go out and sell the lesser part of his learning to earn a living.

'Is it so late? I have a lesson in half an hour, I must go.'

He stood up and began to button his thick old overcoat, pressing his lips together in the unlovely line into which some fifty years had changed the curve of a generous young mouth. I sat there, looking up at him with (I fear) my own slightly open. I wanted, so much, to ask him so many questions . . . and of course I could not ask one. And, of course, I was never again going to be shown any more of the treasure that he had half-revealed to me, neither this afternoon or if he and I ever happened to meet again. It had only been shown to me at all because the boy's agonizing stab had aroused in the old man an equally agonizing longing to defend himself. His eyes now once more wandered over me with the unconscious melancholy of old age.

'I will just go and find our hostess . . .'

He nodded down at me, smiled faintly, then made a little bow, and turned away. As he slowly walked across the room (whose groups were now beginning to thin out as the guests reluctantly departed from the large, worn, old house's cavernous rooms as sea-creatures creep away from some overturned shell) I saw that, as well as all the other things, he had to endure a gait hampered by some withered muscle or arthritic joint; his walk was markedly dragging and slow. I watched him until his wide stooped shoulders had disappeared through the door, and he was lost in the dusk of the hall.

'Going already?' exclaimed my hostess, in absent but offended tones as I paused by her side. 'Why, I have hardly seen you! There were *masses* of people who wanted to meet you . . . and you were sitting in the corner with my Mr. Allen . . . so good of you. Poor old man, he's a bore . . . not the talkative kind . . . one does at least get a chance with him

to talk about *oneself*, ha-ah . . . and not a very nice old man, either, I'm afraid. Rather sour. But I asked him because I thought it would be a little treat for him . . . he's so poor it isn't *true* . . . lives in one room, never goes anywhere . . . hardly sees a soul. I found him in the 'thrillers' section in the Public Library, of all places . . . and you know what I am for lame ducks . . . we chummed up. Well . . . if you must go, you must . . . but I wanted you to meet two brilliant young men . . . they've both gone, I'm afraid . . . but they were *quite* the most interesting people in the room . . .'

LISTEN TO THE MAGNOLIAS

Mrs. BESTWICK lay in the big bed, which she had continued to sleep in after the death of her husband because it reminded her so comfortingly of him, and trembled with fear; not violently, so as to shake the bed or cause the glass to tinkle against the water bottle on the table, but gently, as Mrs. Bestwick did everything, and unceasingly; underneath the fresh warm blankets and the newly-cleaned ciderdown and the sheet, which only that morning she had repaired by machining together its two unworn edges.

The hour was three in the morning, and the Midland night lay stilly along the streets and pressed on the wet roofs of Wapminster; there was not a sound outside; not even a cat wailing, or the distant step of a fire-watcher walking home from the post; the blacked-out lamps, rusted into their four-year disuse, curved like graceful iron flowers high and unseen above the blackness in roads and avenues, and the Wap slid between its banks and past the blue-stained, crumbling basements of the old town without a ripple or a gleam. The big bakery was at work, bursting with heat and light behind its shutters, and the staff of the *Wapminster Recorder* had only just finished putting the paper to bed and gone home to its own, but Dyneford Avenue, where Mrs. Bestwick lived, was at least a half mile from both, and on the fringes of the town the silence was complete.

But Mrs. Bestwick could hear sounds; bestial, terrifying sounds, as she lay and trembled in her bed. She heard long-drawn puffing and bubbling noises, sonorous honkings, deep sighs that partook of the nature of moans, and sometimes the fling of heavy bodies which, disturbed by dreams so

gruesome that even the thick mufflings of sleep could not keep them out, heaved over and jarred the wall against which the beds rested. She was familiar with snores, because her husband had sometimes snored and they had passed mild recurrent jokes about it, but this seemed to her more than an ordinary forcing of human breath through the mouth and nostrils during slumber; it summed up and embodied in its gross texture all the fears which had oppressed her for the past month.

They were here. They were under her roof. They were sleeping in the second-best bedroom and the spare room. Their snores proved it. But every twenty minutes or so, when she awoke with a start out of uneasy sleep, she found it impossible to believe that they were here. And oh, how she dreaded the coming of daylight; if only this night, even with its snores and fear and trembling, could go on for ever.

It was almost exactly a month ago, to the day, that her help Mrs. Corder, looking maliciously over the rim of a cupful of pungent copper tea, had said: 'Terrible about these Yanks, izzen it?' And Mrs. Bestwick had answered in her flat weak voice:

'Something in the paper, is it? I haven' seen the *Sketch* yet.'

'It was my milkman told me. (Course, you wouldn't have the same one as what we do, not livin' up here.) They're goin' to billet them. All over the town, he said. Haven't you 'ad no one round arstin how many rooms you got and that? My daughter has, down our way.'

Mrs. Corder lived in one of the poor streets over the bridge, where the river sometimes flooded into the basements, and she hated Mrs. Bestwick for owning a sound house and all those fiddling bits of brass that were such a trouble to clean, and Mrs. Bestwick, looking with mild blue eyes at her help's exhausted face that was yellow with the

hunger which its owner did not recognize, knew that Mrs. Corder hated her. But the knowledge did not penetrate into that part of her mind where her few, sparse, prim thoughts lived.

'We did have somebody asking me how many rooms there were, but that was months ago.'

'Oh, they was down our way last week. Didn't take me long to tell them off. I've only got one room, I said, so don't you try puttin' any of your Yanks in with me, I said,' and Mrs. Corder gave her loud laugh. 'But they're after the big 'ouses, that's what they're after the milkman said, the big 'ouses.'

'You can't call this a big house.'

'You got four bedrooms.'

'Yes, but you can't call four bedrooms a big house.'

'Some would.' Mrs. Corder poured out more tea and stirred into it an eighth of Mrs. Bestwick's sugar ration, while keeping one eye fixed on Mrs. Bestwick. 'Oh well, you muss 'ope for the bess, thass all. I can't say as I'd like Yanks in my 'ouse, (if I 'ad a house, that is, I mean). I've 'eard they're terrible.'

When Mrs. Corder had gone off to smear the drawing-room, Mrs. Bestwick had stood looking vaguely at the red japanned tea canister, with its picture of a Japanese girl carrying a parasol; and then she looked slowly round the kitchen, and, as usual, she felt that something was musing from it, and, again as usual, it took her almost half a minute to realize that the something was Gertrude.

Gertrude had been her maid; she was dead now (and that was another thing it was very difficult, almost impossible, for Mrs. Bestwick to believe) but she had been with the Bestwicks for ten years, and after Mr. Bestwick had died, ten years before the war broke out, she had been a comfort to Mrs. Bestwick and the kitten who, apart from business

connections and some distant relations, were his sole mourners. So that, altogether, made twenty years.

Gertrude had changed from a round-faced plain girl to a fat-faced ugly woman in Mrs. Bestwick's service. She had seemed 'satisfied' at 14 Dyneford Road; 'happy' was a word not used there. But one morning in 1943, she had gone out to do the shopping as usual, and had come back three hours later with her abundant reddish-grey hair cut short under a new hat with a military peak; talking wildly, and with an even wilder expression in her eyes, about going away into a camp to cook for the soldiers. It was all (she had said) that she could do; and before Mrs. Bestwick could get over her astonishment sufficiently to dissuade her, she had gone.

Left alone, Mrs. Bestwick, though considerably shaken by the event, had too much good sense to wear out her declining strength with housework, although she took it for granted that the domestic standards to which she had always been accustomed should be kept up, and soon she obtained, by means of a sixpenny card displayed in a newsagent's in the High Street, the services of Mrs. Corder, who was too old to be of use in any of the town's new small arms factories.

From that hour, crumbs and smears and dust obtained a footing in 14 Dyneford Avenue, but although Mrs. Bestwick noticed them all, and was distressed by every one, she did not mind them so much as might have been expected. When confronted by them, she usually thought how shocked Gertrude would have been at the sight, and this comforted her, as if she had in some way passed her burden on to Gertrude's broader shoulders.

Mrs. Bestwick was not fond of writing long letters, but she had written regularly to Gertrude once a fortnight, telling her about the latest accomplishment of the kitten, and faithfully recording the gradual decaying of the household

equipment beneath the pressure of war, and Gertrude had as faithfully answered, in short messages scrawled on bent and grubby picture post-cards. Mrs. Bestwick spent much of her time, while she was knitting the wine-coloured or biscuit-coloured jerseys which she favoured (colours far indeed from suggesting the burnt glow of one or the sugary crispness of the other) in wondering how Gertrude was really getting on in those camps; and she had only that day written and posted a letter, saying that Gertrude must come on a visit to her former place the next time the Army gave her leave, when the other letter came from Gertrude's brother, saying that she had been killed in an air raid.

This news really did shake Mrs. Bestwick to the depths of her soft, dim, kindly nature, and she began to feel a trembling dread of violence and change. She began to await with terror the distant thudding of guns defending the big aeroplane factories, ten miles to the north, and to brood over the news in the papers; while, as if to console herself and in some way which she did not try to explain, also to console the dead Gertrude, she tried to draw more closely about herself and the kitten (who was now a stout and handsome cat) the shreds of their former orderly life.

As she lay trembling under the coverings, through which the snoring from behind the, presumably, closed doors of the other bedrooms and her own locked one penetrated with insolent ease, she remembered that she had started being afraid about the Americans from the first day that Mrs. Corder had spoken about them.

For nearly ten years no man had looked at Mrs. Bestwick, who would be fifty-seven years old in the coming April, with interest; Mr. Bestwick, of course, had been different; he was her husband, so naturally he had looked at her with interest, although the full pale cheeks and the full blue eyes of her youth had been allowed by her to lose their mild

beauty without recourse to the witch-doctor's paraphernalia of the beauty specialists.

She was not a pretty ageing woman. She dressed her hair in an unadventurous roll about her head, and covered her flat body with the bright flowered garments in summer, and the tailored woollen ones in winter, which English women prefer, and *she* no longer, of course, looked at men with shy interest under the thick eyelashes of youth.

Much of her fear of the Americans was caused by a secret conviction that men belonged, not merely to the other sex, but to another race than the human; had she lived a hundred years ago, she would certainly have called them *horrid creatures*; and it had come to be silently agreed between herself and Gertrude that they were fortunate to live in a house untroubled by the presence of these large, mysterious and perpetually hungry beings. When one or the other chanced to hear a piece of local gossip concerning some selfish son or unsatisfactory brother, they would exchange significant glances which congratulated themselves upon their good luck. Any small comfort which Mrs. Bestwick did obtain during the increasingly harassing month while she awaited the blow to fall and her house to be chosen, had come from imagining how cross and upset Gertrude would have been at the prospect of American soldiers tramping with dirty boots over her clean floors.

Mrs. Bestwick did not confide her increasing terror to any of her friends and acquaintances, because she was sure that they would laugh at her, and would not understand how she felt. No other housewife in Dyneford Avenue was in exactly the same position as herself; widowed, and bereft of her faithful servant by a whim of the latter which had ended in her death; most of them had husbands and grown-up children who could help them to endure the ordeal; and the few who were unmarried, though they expressed fears

that their rooms would be damaged and their peaceful routine interrupted, somehow conveyed to Mrs. Bestwick the conviction that they were rather looking forward to the prospect. They were not likely, she felt, either to understand or to sympathise.

Then there was the question of Being Patriotic. Mrs. Bestwick knew quite well that she ought to welcome this opportunity of doing something for the American boys, when everyone had been so kind all over the world to our boys wherever they went, but somehow she could not think of the threatened Americans as boys; she imagined them as small, square, ageless men in slouch hats, the 'doughboys' whom, as a young woman, she had watched marching through London nearly thirty years ago, and alarmingly tough and leathery they had looked. Make such creatures fruit flans? Get out the best doilies for them? They would sneer at the first and tear the second in fragments with their teeth, and yet it was her duty to lay both before them with a willing heart. Her misery was increased by the gnawings of conscience.

Misery and apprehension could not ward off the day when a large, mechanically-polite billeting officer banged the knocker of 14 Dyneford Avenue almost through its front door, and, standing at a height of some nine feet above Mrs. Bestwick, and looking straight through the hall, with its brass and ferns mercilessly exposed to his indifferent eye, asked her how many bedrooms she had? Having drooped his head by some three feet to catch the faltered reply that she had four, and having demanded how many of them were occupied and received the reply 'One', in a voice which modesty made even fainter than usual, he shuffled through some papers and then announced that on a certain date she could expect five soldiers to be billeted upon her, for whom she must supply certain meals and for whose keep she would

receive money. Then he went on to the next house, leaving Mrs. Bestwick to shut the door slowly with terror and despair in undisputed possession of her feelings. *Five!*

After this ominous visitation, the days began to pass with nightmare speed and yet to contain long hours, it seemed to her, in which to brood and worry. What would they eat? Baked beans, Mrs. Harwood at Number 22 assured her, and ice cream and fried chicken; none of them *easy* things to get nowadays, but we didn't want the American boys to carry back a bad impression of us, did we? No, murmured Mrs. Bestwick, thinking that she did not care, if only they would carry themselves back as well. What would she talk to them about? Would she ever be able to have a bath again? Of the other place she dared not think.

And who would clean their boots? She knew that English soldiers cleaned their own buttons, because she had once been to tea with Mrs. Leicester at Number 17 when her son Robert was home on leave, and had seen him doing it with the help of a neat and curiously attractive little device which prevented the polish from staining his uniform, but what did American soldiers do about their boots? Ten boots! and the American Army was sure to have higher standards than the English one. She would still be polishing boots while they were rushing out of the bathroom shouting for their breakfasts.

If only they had not been Americans! That added the final touch of exotic horror to the situation. She doubted if she would be able to understand what they wanted, for on the rare occasions when she went to the pictures she had difficulty in hearing what Americans said, because they talked so fast and used such funny expressions, and if she could not understand what they wanted, it would mean (being men) that they would always be cross. She became more silent and drawn as the dreaded day approached, and Mrs. Corder,

who had got the news out of her by pumping early on, added to her unhappiness by telling frightening stories about the habits and needs of Yanks, salting her report with hints about one thing at least which they would not be requiring from Mrs. Bestwick or herself.

On the morning of the day when they were expected, Mrs. Bestwick went shopping. She bought fifteen doughnuts, and a pound of coffee, and five small American flags, and she also called for the two tins of baked beans which the grocer had promised to let her have, and the grocer actually kept his word. Chickens were two pounds each, and it was not economy that made her decide against the purchase of a bird so meagre that it would have scarcely provided a full meal for two, let alone five. When she returned home, she found Mrs. Corder sullenly flinging the clean bedclothes on to the last of the five beds. It was late February, and all the flowers that Mrs. Bestwick could find were cultivated white narcissi, that looked sickly but smelt sweet, and she spent ten shillings on them.

The day drew on. Mrs. Corder finished her two hours and left, some ten minutes before that event was strictly due, and Mrs. Bestwick sat down to her lunch, presented on a lace mat and supported by a napkin in its ring, and ate.

Rain began to fall, and a mist settled down over the streets, and with it a weeping hush. The house grew so dark that Mrs. Bestwick had to turn on the lights while she arranged the flowers in the rooms, and printed some half-dozen notices on post-cards, saying: 'TO THE KITCHEN', 'BEDROOM 1', 'BEDROOM 2', 'BEDROOM 3', 'PRIVATE', 'PLEASE MAKE YOURSELVES COMFORTABLE', and finally 'WELCOME TO AN ENGLISH HOME'. These she arranged in the appropriate places, with the last-mentioned placed conspicuously in the hall beside the American flags stuck into the last one, and the largest, of some apples which she had been storing since

September; it was wrinkled now, but it was a Cox's Pippin and it still looked a good apple.

When she had arranged the doughnuts and the coffee, with saucepan, milk, sugar, and matches, cups and plates on the kitchen table, the time was half-past four. It was not quite dark and the rain had stopped. She drew the black curtains over the windows, shutting out the louring dark blue sky and one dim yellow streak in the west; and carried a tray upstairs to the drawing-room and drank the tea sitting by the fire, because she always took her tea so in winter-time, and as if her heart had not been striking hard with terror against her side since early afternoon.

No sounds came from the distant town. After the distant click or clap of six front doors being shut, with varying degrees of loudness up and down the road at intervals, behind Mr. Simmons, Mr. Payne, Mr. Robertson, Miss Gaynor and young Arthur Mickleham, returning from business or from school, there were no sounds in Dyneford Avenue. The wirelesses were going, but the sound walls of houses built in 1906 kept out their noise. The cat had insisted, with the heartlessness characteristic of his race, on being let out as usual, heedless of Mrs. Bestwick's quavering warning that she would not be able to leave a window ajar and that the kitchen might be full of nasty men when he returned; and after his fluff-fringed posterior had vanished into the damp twilight, the house was quiet indeed. Mrs. Bestwick looked at the clock in the kitchen and it said a quarter-past five. She had not dared to ask the billeting officer what time the men would be arriving, and uncertainty had added its unwelcome presence to her harassing day, but now she knew at least that they would not be here until after dark, and that everything was ready for them.

She went across the kitchen, where she had gone to let out the unchivalrous cat, and picked up the large tray she had

prepared for herself, with thermos flask and hot water bottle and biscuits: the situation was too upsetting for her to dream of eating some sandwiches, which in happier times she had always welcomed an excuse for doing. She added the new numbers of *The Lady* and the *Wapminster Recorder* and her electric torch, and climbed slowly upstairs to her bedroom. She came down once more for a last inspection of the banked yet cheerful fires in kitchen and drawing-room, and opened the doors of the soldiers' bedrooms a mere two inches to see that the electric stoves were burning steadily; the narcissi were looking delicately at her through the red dusk, and even scenting the air a very little. Then, having nervously made her toilet, she went into her bedroom and, as if it were already ten o'clock, began to retire.

It was peaceful in the large chill room with the white furniture and pink walls and carpet, and at eight o'clock, while she was sitting up in bed drinking tea, with the hot water bottle at her feet, and the *Recorder's* mild pages spread out before her, she forgot for five minutes what was going to happen later that evening, and enjoyed the occasion, but when she did remember, the return of misery was so acute that she would rather not have had the respite.

When all the tea had gone, and she had finished both *Lady* and *Recorder* and the biscuits, she put out her bedside lamp and lay down, as she always did at half-past ten, to sleep. But at once she began to listen, a thing she never did unless there was a warning on. She listened intently into the mild, damp darkness stretching beyond the thick curtains at the window, but there was not a sound; not a footfall, nor a sigh of the wind through bare trees, not even the distant whistle of a train going through on its way to the north, for there was no wind to bring the sound from the main line station five miles away; and the lorries coming down from Birmingham did not begin their far-off, intermittent dron-

ing until after midnight. She was listening for two sounds; the grinding of approaching heavy wheels and the tramp of marching feet, but as eleven drew near and there was no sound, she began to hope. There might have been a mistake. The billeting officer might have decided, after all, that her house was not suitable. The five soldiers might have been sent somewhere else. She might yet awaken in the morning to find herself alone in the house.

But at this thought, she was not as relieved as she ought to have been. If they did not come to-night, they would come to-morrow, and then she would have no excuse for being in bed and would have to receive them. And the doughnuts would be stale, and the stoves would have shockingly wasted current all night for nothing, and the narcissi would surely be withered, and the 'Cox's Pippin, no longer in its prime and compelled even so to support five American flags, would have become brown and unattractive. No; having been worked up to, and having worked 14 Dyneford Avenue up to, this pitch of welcome, for heaven's sake (thought Mrs. Bestwick, lying in bed listening) let them come.

And, even as if this challenge flung down to Fate had been overheard and accepted, at that very moment a growling and clanking began to swell in the distance, out on the road leading to Gloagby Camp; faintly at first, so that Mrs. Bestwick could not be certain if she were hearing it, and then rapidly, as the lorry approached the edge of the town. When Mrs. Bestwick heard it reach the corner of the avenue, which was just far enough distant from the house for her purpose, she got out of bed very quickly, stepped into her slippers standing ready, and ran across the room, and downstairs, and along the dim chilly hall, catching up, as she pattered past the table, the key of the front door, which she had detached from its steel ring and strung upon a loop of

coarse white twine. Pausing only to switch off the light, she opened the door quickly; and, leaning half round it into the cold damp air, with thudding heart and compressed lips and forehead wrinkled deeply by anxiety, she looped the key round the door's ornamental knob. Then she shut the front door, switched on the light as she passed it, and quickly retreated up the stairs and into her bedroom, locking the door behind her.

The agreeably warm patch in the middle of the bed had not had time to cool, and she settled herself down into it with as much relief as she could feel amidst the bodily sensations of fear. But now the dark room seemed to dissolve about her, and its well known furniture and pictures too, and the only sensation she felt was one of *listening*; all of her was listening; and the very walls of the house seemed to be melting away, so that they were no longer a protection from what was coming. The lorries (there was more noise than one would make by itself) turned the corner, and came clanking and grinding down between the houses; and then they stopped, one after the other; and almost at once the street echoed with men's voices, the stamp of feet on stone and the slamming of doors, but Mrs. Bestwick, although hearing all these sounds, was waiting for the click of her own gate, and footsteps along her own path, and voices outside her front door, and the sounds going on outside other people's houses, the shouted words of command and the bumping of heavy packs on the pavement, did not frighten her because they seemed not to have anything to do with her.

But presently, while the voices and stamping and the subdued hoarse instructions were at their loudest under the black night, she did hear the unmistakable click of her own gate-latch being dropped into its socket, and then—how heavily and determinedly—footsteps advancing down the gravel path, and stopping before the front door. Then

silence. But she was listening so strainedly that in a minute she heard the soldiers whispering. Their whispers were extraordinarily deep, though soft-sounding, and they floated up to her through the distant clamour of voices and footsteps in the street in a low-pitched, intermittent buzzing which was—musical. That was the unexpected word which came into her head; and then she imagined the men consulting between themselves whether they should knock at the door. But very soon they found the key on its string, for she heard the front door open. Then it closed again, gently and, as it were, cautiously.

Now they were actually in the house. They were being very quiet. They were moving slowly about; reading her post-card notices, cautiously opening doors, peering into empty rooms. She heard boards creaking, loud footsteps moving along the passage to the kitchen, and then the distant, deep burr of their voices. The house seemed full of them; it was as if there were fifteen soldiers in each room; and all that she silently prayed for, as she lay there huddled and shaking, was that they would not want something that she had forgotten to put out for them, and come knocking on her locked door.

Later—very late, it was almost one o'clock—she heard them creeping ponderously up the stairs to bed. It seemed that the heavy murmur of their talking had been going on behind the kitchen door for many hours, and she had dropped off, while listening to it, into the first of those unrefreshing dozes of which she was to have many during the wretched night. Now nothing was between her and them but her frail door. Her skin broke into a light sweat; and at this startling dampness on her brow her natural English gentleness, touched sturdily with common sense, for the first time reminded her that most people were nice, and why should American boys, who had come over here to

help us fight Hitler, not be as nice as our own boys were? But the comforting thought was almost literally drowned by a gurgling and rushing of taps and flushes that went on, by Mrs. Bestwick's own reliable watch consulted by torchlight, for one hour and eight minutes. They must have used every drop of water in the tank five times over, she thought. Poor boys, I expect they were dirty. So will the bath be—and the towels—and the bathroom floor . . . perhaps the water will go through the drawing-room ceiling . . .

She dozed off again.

She was awakened by the flinging about and the snoring already described, and at first she could not for the life of her imagine what the sounds were. Had the soldiers got drunk? Were they fighting? Were they all ill? There were moaning sounds, and prolonged, undulating, shuddering roars that ended in muffled gobblings, and they were *all* doing it, because she counted five separate and distinct sources of sound. When she realized that they were only snoring, her relief brought tears to her eyes, and although the heavy reverberations along the enclosed air of the house prevented her from even dozing as deeply as she had done before they began, what sleep she had was not so troubled by sensations of fear. The last time she opened her eyes it was five o'clock, and the snoring had been succeeded by a silence so awful and complete that it suggested they had all suddenly died. Acting upon her exhausted nerves like a powerful drug, it caused her to fall instantly and deeply asleep.

She was awakened by a smell, so rich and strong that it penetrated through the door of her room and assailed her senses while she was yet slumbering; and when she slowly and obediently opened her eyes in response to its summons, she did not at first experience it as anything but a disembodied deliciousness. Then she recognized the scent of brewing coffee. She looked languidly at the window curtains, and

EDWARDIAN AFTERNOON

It is warm, and calm, and sunny, and the sky is a thick pure blue, and the fruit trees are out and flowering in the large gardens at Sydenham; pear and apple and plum, apricot and cherry, with the laburnum and the lilac, and here and there a tree of pink or white may. The comfortable red gables rise out of all this foliage and blossom, and there are gay and comfortable voices rising up through it as well; under the lilac's mauve tassels and the laburnum's yellow fringe, voices rising from the lawns into the warm drowsy air; floating up from summerhouses made of lattice-work, and from deck chairs that have been set in the shade; lingering by garden rollers that have been hauled into cool corners, and beside lawn mowers whose pullers have stopped for a rest; laughing voices calling the score at tennis nets, and more leisurely voices talking above the click of mallets on the croquet balls where the white hoops stud the shaved and drying lawns. For it is Saturday, and the men are home from their offices, and all over Sydenham afternoon tea is being prepared; in large cool drawing-rooms, or set out in the gardens whose blossoming trees lift their laden, scented, bee-haunted branches into the sunlit air of the year nineteen hundred and nine.

Sophia has climbed into the cherry tree at the end of the garden at Boskdale. She does not want to be caught up there, because, only this morning, while she was dawdling in the scullery (where the maids do not like her to be) under the little window opening on the sideway, she heard her grandfather go past outside, accompanied by Mr. Crompton on their way to inspect the lettuces in the latter's kitchen

garden. She heard them pause, and then a clinking sound, as her grandfather deftly removed, and restored to a safer position, a rake which had threatened to trip him up. 'Ah—the work of *our young friend Sophia*,' he had observed, as they passed on, and this way of referring to his granddaughter had struck unpleasantly upon her ear. She usually relishes these queer sayings of Grandpa's, but not this one. She is not yet nine years old, and has no word for sarcasm, but she had known that he was cross, and would perhaps tell about the rake to Aunt Nettie.

And now, if she is caught up in the cherry tree, she will not only be call a *tom boy*, but Aunt Nettie will certainly tell her that *A whistling woman and a crowing hen is good for neither God nor men*, for Aunt Nettie loses no opportunity of showing her disapproval of Sophia's whistle, almost as shrill and clear as a boy's, of which Sophia is so proud.

So Sophia keeps motionless and silent, looking down between white flowers and pinkish-green leaves at the servants setting out small tables on the lawn, and covering them with white cloths, fringed four inches deep in crochet lace made by Cousin Rita and Auntie Daisy.

The two servants have already 'changed'; their blue print morning dresses have been replaced by thin poplin black ones, whose dusty hems sweep the grass as they move swiftly between the tables, and starched white aprons and caps. They don't look fagged or seedy like most skivvies; both are plump girls in the early twenties, who enjoy the good living provided at Boskdale, and easily divide between them the work of the large four-story house; and this afternoon, though they are grumbling, they are in fact looking forward to the At Home, which is to begin at four o'clock.

Before luncheon, Sophia has gone down to Theodores' with Auntie Daisy to buy buns, and there are exquisitely funny jokes made about these buns beforehand by Grandpa.

You see, there are *penny* buns that are quite large, and *ha'penny* buns that are medium-sized, and *farthing* buns that are tiny, and what is so funny, is that the *money* to pay for these buns gets smaller in size as it goes down *too!* and somehow it is all mixed up with the Three Bears as well. No wonder they all laugh so much; even Aunt Nettie. And then Sophia enjoys running with Auntie Daisy, almost all the way to 'Theodores'. It is a ripping run, simply ripping. But when they are walking home with the two big bags of buns, a thought suddenly strikes her that clouds the bright day.

'Will I have to go to bed at my usherl time?' she asks, looking up at Auntie Daisy.

'Shouldn't think so, dearie. I expect if you ask Aunt Nettie she'll let you sit up a wee bit later.'

'Oh, do you think she will? I do so HATE going to bed.'

['Oh, I love my beddy-byes. I always look forward to getting into it,' Auntie Daisy sighs, looking keenly at hats as they pass Mayhew and Cotters *Bon Marché*.

This confession strikes Sophia silent with amazement for nearly ten minutes. *Love* going to bed? What *can* Auntie Daisy mean? More than once, she looks curiously and earnestly upwards at what she can see of a square young chin, narrow red lips, and golden hair puffing out beneath a big hat of navy straw wreathed with marguerites. How *can* anyone love going to bed? But when they get home, there are so many things to do that she forgets about it.

She had just learned to read properly. After luncheon, when the grown-ups have gone to lie down and the maids are clearing away and washing-up, she goes upstairs to the attic whose windows overlook the garden, and, having shut the door, sits down amidst the paper novelettes strewn over the floor. There are hundreds of them in the sunlit room, whose papered walls are patterned with faded violets; *Happy Hour Stories* and *Christian Novels*, and many others whose

names Sophia does not notice, and she becomes absorbed in a story called *Marie Lattimer—Nun*. It is about a girl with a funny name—Loveday. Sophia keeps thinking what a strange name it is, even while she reads how *Marie Lattimer—Nun* helps Loveday when she is in great trouble above Love. Love comes into these stories a lot, with blushes, and beatings of the heart, and turning pale. Sophia is not very interested in Love, but she loves to read; to read, with her hair straggling over her eyes, crouching in complete forgetfulness of the real world, amidst the booklets with their gaudy covers; to read, seeing and hearing and feeling nothing except the young man are clasped in each others arms, and *Marie Lattimer—Nun*, the passion of a lifetime is beginning.

At last, after much suffering, Loveday and the handsome young man are clasped in each others arms, and *Marie Lattimer—Nun*, with a sweet sad smile, lingeringly closes the gate of the convent garden upon them. Sophia slams down the book, thinking *ripping*, and sits for a little while, musing upon what a queer name Loveday is; within a week she will have forgotten the story, but the name will stay with her. Then she runs downstairs.

'Out of the way now, please, me and May are busy,' Jessie Bent says crisply, when Sophia puts her head round the kitchen door. Jessie is cutting crusts off the thin, moist bread for cucumber sandwiches, while May carefully wipes with a damp cloth the already gleaming surfaces of fine china cups patterned in red and gold. They look, with guarded amiability, at Sophia.

'What's that?' She has seen an unfamiliar object.

'I 'eard someone say as it's rude to point. That? That's a tea urn.'

Sophia examines it with silent interest; from a distance, and without touching it. She does not say that she has never seen one before.

'Who brought it?'

'Goddard's. Didn't you 'ear Miss Daisy asking them why they 'adn't sent it? You was down there with 'er this morn-ing. It didn't come not till after lunch.'

Sophia shakes her head. Undeniably, she does not look an alert child, and 'dreamy' is too pretty a word to bestow upon her habitual brooding, absent expression.

'I know someone what never sees a inch before their nose,' says May Calkin, sailing swiftly by with a laden tray.

'Now you run along, there's a dear. Me and May 'ave got to take these 'erc things down to the garden.'

Sophia dawdles out of doors. It is while both maids have returned to the house, on some errand, that she wanders round the cherry tree and finds, near the wall, the step ladder which the gardener, who has been using it to do some pruning, has forgotten to put away. Rather shamefacedly (for she longs to spring up the trunk even as her hero Tim Pippin, springs upon the snorting heads of dragons in her favourite *Young Folks Tales*, but she is not the springing sort) she uses it to ascend the tree.

But it is ripping up there, with no one knowing where she is. She can see everything that is going on. At the back of her mind nags the knowledge that soon she must descend, and go indoors to change her grubby sailor blouse and serge skirt for the hated white nunsveiling dress made for her by Aunt Nettie, but she cannot bring herself to go. The afternoon is drawing on, with every wallflower and tulip opening wider and wider into the steady light, and now the tables begin to look full, and prettily arranged, and the maids' journeys between house and garden become fewer and at longer intervals. The red and gilt cups glow in the shade, and the *tea urn*, which Sophia likes to look at and think about, twinkles and gleams and reflects, in a bulging,

goblin-like picture, the dark green shrubs and the black and white figures of the maids as they pass.

Grandpa is standing at his bedroom window, as he always does to perform this part of his toilet, and brushing the brillianine, which Sophia likes to smell, into his thick grey hair with two brushes; she can see him between the leaves. Soon he comes down into the garden, wearing a check suit with a pansy in his button-hole, and strolls about (too near the cherry tree for her comfort) inspecting the flowers.

And now Aunt Nettie is coming slowly down the garden, under a fawn silk sunshade covered with white lace.

'Godfrey,' she says, pausing beside Grandpa and speaking in a low voice which Sophia, to her fearful delight, can nevertheless hear perfectly, 'are you going to speak to Freddie this afternoon?'

'I suppose so, Net. Yes. Yes, I will,' answers Grandpa, and Sophia feels sorry for him. Aunt Nettie is making him do something he does not want to, just as she is always making Sophia and Auntie Daisy do something *they* don't want to. Sophia knows, of course, who Freddie is. It is Freddie Hammond, who goes cycling with Auntie Daisy and Rita. Sophia hates him because he is always teasing her.

'But are you sure, Net, that he has really made up his mind?' Grandpa continues. 'I sometimes think it's Daisy he's sweet on.'

'Daisy!' But then, although Sophia feels sure Aunt Nettie is going to say something horrid, she doesn't. 'Oh, Daisy's such a funny girl, so shy with fellows sometimes and then coming out with something saucy—they don't know how to take her. I can't imagine Daisy ever getting off, somehow, and I'm sure *you* don't want to lose her, Godfrey.' Sophia can see Aunt Nettie's cold round blue eyes as she says this, although her red hair and her red face are hidden under the sunshade.

'I want my girl as long as she'll stay with me,' Grandpa says cheerfully, looking round, 'and where is my girl?'

'Here, Daddy,' calls Auntie Daisy, from among the tables where she and Rita are setting out the cakes, and taking the sandwiches from their dampened napkins, for it is almost four o'clock, 'Do you want me?'

'Not specially, my Daisybird. I was only wondering where you were . . . so you think it's Rita he's after?' in a lowered voice, to Aunt Nettie.

'Of course it is, Godfrey. How blind you men are. And it looks so bad, his hanging about here every evening and most week-ends. We don't want the girls talked about, do we?'

'Damned blatherskites, damned gossips, why can't people mind their own damned business?' demands Grandpa, jamming both hands into his pockets, and frowning until it seems that his eyebrows must meet his heavy curling moustache.

'Now don't swear, please, Godfrey, what good does it do? Just you get Freddie to yourself for a quarter of an hour this afternoon, please, and ask him his intentions,' and Aunt Nettie smiles and gently, purringly, pats his arm with her plump white hand, and he strolls off, muttering, "What prizes we are!"

Aunt Nettie does not move, but stands still, quietly studying something near at hand.

Sophia, now guiltily aware that the moment for descent is upon her, but reluctant to leave all these interesting discoveries, studies Aunt Nettie in her turn. She is quite old, she thinks coolly. She is fat. That fawny dress all over shiny beads and braid doesn't look pretty. Perhaps she's—she's—*forty* years old. As if exhausted by this effort of imagination, her mind then drifts away from Aunt Nettie, and she looks down at Rita, who is helping Auntie Daisy with the last-minute touches to the tables.

It is always difficult for Sophia to decide which is the prettier of the two. She loves Auntie Daisy best, because she is sister to Sophia's own mother, but Rita has a pale face with large blue eyes in it, and dark hair whose curls blow about her forehead, and when she laughs it sounds as if she cannot help the sound coming out of her pink, always parted lips. She is never cross. She uses certain words that Sophia likes, but when, at home, her father hears her say: 'We just lost the *bally* bus,' or 'ta' instead of 'thank you', or '*chocs*' for 'chocolates', he coldly forbids her to use them.

This afternoon, the blue ribbons on Rita's camisole glimmer through her white blouse, and her stiff white piqué skirt is circled by a silver belt, with a rose tucked in it. Auntie Daisy, who is only as tall as Sophia, has a brown silk skirt matching her velvety eyes, and a plaid silk blouse. Sophia can hear her silver bangles jingle as she picks up her scarlet sunshade. She takes a last careful look round the tables, for at any moment now the company will begin to arrive.

'Daisy—' It is the low voice of Aunt Nettie, which always makes Sophia think of the smell of metal-polish. She is still standing where Grandpa had left her. 'Daisy, come here, a minute, dearie.'

Auntie Daisy, looking less cheerful, moves obediently forward with the braid of her skirt brushing along the grass.

'You can't be seen like that, dear; pop upstairs and tidy yourself. Your comb's coming out . . .' Sophia can see plump fingers jabbing into Auntie Daisy's hair—'and your blouse is coming out—that tie looks a perfect sight——' jerk, jerk, poke, poke.

'Oh lord! Is it? I dressed in about two ticks, and I didn't have time——'

'Hurry up, now, they'll be here any minute. What a worry you are, Daisy; isn't it time, at your age, you knew

how to dress yourself? How do you ever expect the fellows to come after you, when you look such a rag bag?’

Auntie Daisy hurries away, with both small hands snatching at hair and waist and neck in quick gestures, and Sophia thinks what a beast Aunt Nettie is.

‘And you come down out of that tree, Sophia,’ calls the beast, suddenly tilting her head and looking full at her, ‘don’t think I can’t see you up there. Go indoors and get your Aunt Daisy to wash your face and hands and put on your pretty frock; I expect you’re as black as a chimney sweep. And here——’ (there is in Aunt Nettie’s voice the awful casualness of a grown-up who has, for days now, guessed one’s dearest secret) ‘comes Mrs. Walker with Murray. You don’t want *him* to see you with a black face.’

It is unanswerable. Indeed and indeed, Sophia does not want Murray Walker to see that face, crimson as it now is with mingled hero-worship and fury, and she indulges herself with only one glance at his curly red head and white flannels (he is sixteen—pretty nearly grown up) as she creeps awkwardly down the ladder and makes her way through syringa and snowball bushes towards the house. He does not see her; he hardly ever does; and she does not particularly want him to, being at the happy age when one is content merely to love.

Auntie Daisy has been crying.

‘Nothing’s the matter. Shut up. Here, wash your own potty face, then.’

‘I think Aunt Nettie’s a beast.’

‘Sh’sh!’

‘I was up in the cherry tree. I *heard* her.’

‘Were you, old girl? How did you get your fat self up there? Climbed the ladder? Well, you were a brave *lad*, weren’t you? Hands clean? Come along, then.’

Auntie Daisy, having hastily wiped a leaf of *papier à poudré* over her flushed cheeks, twines her arm about the middle of Sophia and they return to the garden, looking (they hope) cool and charming.

And now, unhurriedly, and wearing a general expression of decorous pleasure, the guests are beginning to arrive; entering the large front garden through the gate opening on to the road, which Grandpa has previously propped open by means of a china door-stop from the drawing-room, made in the shape of a grotesque yellow cat. Tranquilly, they come in from the wide shady avenue with its well kept gardens and its church, well-filled on Sundays, that stands on the corner; the girls are in muslin blouses worn above starched white skirts, with big hats carrying a light load of summer flowers, and the young men are in boaters and flannels. Old Mrs. Crompton is cheerfully propelled along in her bath chair by her tall son Henry, while her two tall daughters, Ada and Grace, walk slowly beside her, graceful as swans, wearing sweet voile dresses and slowly turning their long slim necks, encased in boned net collars, to acknowledge the greetings of neighbours and friends. How tall all these grown-up girls look to Sophia, as, presently, she moves from group to group handing tea-cake, and sees them smile down at her from above a jabot of creamy lace or a knotted tie of silk. They are like Loveday in the story. Their hats are beautiful. Their beauty and kindness bathe her in a slow, sweet, unfolding glow, and she is all happiness.

Freddie Hammond has been playing cricket. Football and singing in winter, cricket and cycling and swimming in summer, and, in between, always the office: this is Freddie's happy, busy, useful life. This afternoon the Lennards' garden looks so jolly, and the girls so pretty, that he begins to smile even before he has passed that yellow china cat

sitting so absurdly at the gate; and there's Rita (making eyes like anything at Joe Parsons, but Freddie will soon put a stop to that), and there's little Daisy with her bangles jingling—and so he moves slowly forward into the smiling, chattering, softly-coloured crowd.

Daisy is handing tea to the Bells when he comes up to her. She flashes a smile at him from her beautiful eyes, as if they had never shed a tear, and suddenly makes one of her saucy speeches. The Bells laugh, and Freddie laughs too, and he is just taking her hand to look at the newest charm on her bracelet—when another hand, a middle-aged and plump hand—glides under his arm and with a gentle pressure Aunt Nettie leads him away.

'You're late, you bad fellow. Rita has been wondering where you had got to.'

'Oh I say, Mrs. Lister, I'm awfully sorry. We won our match quite easily', (he suppresses the natural instinct to tell her the score), 'and as that was quite early on, and I'd had my innings, I made my excuses and came away . . . it isn't awfully late, is it?'

'Not 'awfully' late. . . . But Rita likes to have you here, you know.'

'Oh—rather.' He gives an embarrassed laugh, but his grey eyes shine with pleasure and his hand goes up to his thick blond moustache, 'that's awfully nice of—you both. I say, there she is! Er—can I get you some tea—or anything—or shall I—I mean——'

Aunt Nettie purses her thin lips understandingly, gives him one of her gentle pushes, and nods her head. Sophia, without thinking much about it, because she is pantingly working her way towards Murray Walker with the cream, notices that Freddie gets close to Rita and stays there for some time.

But Sophia is kept so busy marching about with her tray

of sugar and milk and cream that she forgets everything, even Murray Walker, in dreamily watching the procession of hands pouring their choice into the elegantly half-filled cups: the ladies have a pearly or white kid glove dangling from the bared wrist, and the men's hands are sunburnt. Occasionally on her errands she passes close to Grandpa, and sees him chatting with old gentlemen (she never thinks of Grandpa himself as being old) and catches the words 'damned Lloyd George' or 'suffragettes'. The garden is full of people now, murmuring and moving between the pale green of the dry lawn and the darker green of the shrubs, and to Sophia, the slowly-swaying, coloured dresses below the pink faces are so mingled with the flowers on the ground and the flowers in the trees that her eye makes no dividing line between the two.

'Is that Ethel's little girl? What an ark!'

'Yes,' (Aunt Nettie thinks Sophia is not listening, but she is), 'Ethel brought her down yesterday to stay for a month, because the new one,' in a lowered tone, 'is due any day now.'

'A whole month? I expect you *did* say the alphabet backwards!'

'Yes, I did. There is quite enough to do, looking after our own two girls.'

Aunt Nettie moves on, leaving Sophia wondering what an ark is, and who the new one is, and why Aunt Nettie should have said the alphabet backwards? It would be very difficult to do; she begins to try it herself; but breaks off when she sees Grandpa's light check coat brushing past. He is with Freddie Hammond, and they are going, Sophia hears Grandpa say gaily, to look at the sweet peas. But Sophia knows that Grandpa is going to talk to Freddie about *making up his mind*, as Aunt Nettie had said, and so she strolls, with the absent expression that can be so useful to her, down

the garden after the two, carrying her now empty silver jugs and basin. Then, when they reach the delicious-smelling, delicate hedge of pink and white and mauve at the garden's far end, and stand there talking without once looking at it, she gets quite near to them by following Little Billee, the collie, who as usual has followed Grandpa, and is now lying panting on the grass. Sophia sits down by Little Billie and buries her nose in his neck, which smells of hotness and dogness; she has no love for dogs, and there has been one occasion lately (which she is still trying to forget) when, as she was staring at Little Billee's pretty, pointed face it had suddenly looked quite different, and very frightening, but now her sudden attentions to Little Billee make a good excuse to be near the sweet-pea hedge.

'It's time we got things straight,' Fred,' Grandpa is saying, looking cheerful but speaking in a miserable voice, 'I expect you understand what I mean—er——'

'Yes, Mr. Lennard,' says Freddie Hammond, standing rather straight and looking respectfully at Grandpa.

Freddie Hammond is a beast, thinks Sophia, coldly; so large, so hairy when he kisses you under the mistletoe at Christmas, so smelling of tobacco; always teasing. *If he ever gets to know about Murray I will run away to the Wild West and never, never come back.*

'It's high time you made up your mind, you know. The fact of the matter is, my boy—you know we like having you round here, you are always welcome, my sister and I always like to see you, but—er—the girls—the fact is, you really *must* make up your mind.' And Grandpa, who is not a tall man, draws up his slim person until, in place of his customary lovable aura, he is wrapped in dignity. 'Now—which of them is it to be?'

'Well, sir——' Freddie smiles his honest, cheerful smile, 'they're both so pretty and jolly, you know, it's difficult——'

'But dammit, Fred, you must *have* a preference. Is it Daisy?'

Sophia, listening intently with the ear not buried in the toffee-coloured frills of Little Billee's neck, knows that Grandpa does not want 'it' to be Daisy. His voice sounds the same as usual, but somehow she knows.

'Daisy Bell,' Freddie says, lingering on the name, 'we've all had such jolly times together, the three of us . . .'

'Take your time,' says Grandpa, still wrapped in his unfamiliar aura, still drawn up to his full height, and using the same voice in which he had described Sophia as *our young friend*, 'the day is yet young.'

Sophia stores this away for future use. She has many of these sayings of Grandpa's. *We must away to the mountain brow*, says Grandpa, when he wants her to come and watch him mow the lawn: *I knew him well; his mother did our washing*, when an acquaintance (usually one of Aunt Nettie's) boasts the friendship of some distinguished man. Aunt Nettie never talks like this; it annoys her when Grandpa does it; but Auntie Daisy has picked up some of it; it is quite different from Rita's *bally* and *chocs*, and Sophia enjoys it even more.

'It is Rita, then?' asks Grandpa at length, his patience (which is never considerable) being exhausted.

Freddie Hammond, who has been staring at his boots, looks up with relief shining upon his kind forehead and yellow moustache.

'After all, we've known each other since she was five and I was eight, and then I used to carry her books home from school, you know, and I think—I hope, I mean—she likes me a little . . .'

'I'm sure she does,' interrupts Grandpa warmly, and he slaps Freddie on the back. (Sophia knows he is glad because 'it' is not Auntie Daisy.) 'And—er—we—it's quite satis-

factory to her mother and myself, Fred, (I'm her guardian, you know, since poor George Lister died), in fact, we both like you very much, and we shall be pleased to have you in the family. But it was high time that we had your cards on the table, eh?

'Yes, sir, it was,' Freddie Hammond laughs, and moves his weight from one foot to the other.

'Well, then. That is settled. And now—er—about your prospects, Fred, I mean of course your financial prospects——'

But just at this exciting moment, when Sophia has lifted the other ear off Little Billee and is listening with both as hard as she can listen, Little Billee suddenly wearies of supporting most of her weight and utters a long, low, protesting growl, which causes Grandpa and Freddie Hammond to glance towards them.

'Sophia, stop teasing the dog and run away!' says Grandpa, quite sharply, and Sophia gets up off Little Billee, and saunters proudly back to what remains of the garden party.

For now it is almost six o'clock, and the sun is going down behind the spire of the church on the corner, and gnats and midges are moving up and down in a gauzy cloud outside the damp walls of the conservatory. Old Mrs. Crompton has been wheeled away by tall Henry, with tall Ada and Grace gliding one on either side, almost half an hour ago. Mr. Dodgeson has gone, and the Cunninghams, and the Bryces. The tea urn, which has never stopped hissing for nearly two hours, is silent at last, and the servants are standing idly behind it, sometimes exchanging remarks in low voices, but more often staring apathetically at the few remaining guests—a habit of which Aunt Nettie, herself alive with inquisitiveness, has not broken them because she has not noticed it.

'Auntie Daisy, Auntie Daisy.'

'Well, here am I. What is it? Is the house on fire?'

'No. Oh, is it?' Sophia looks wildly up at the solid brick walls clothed in creeper and ivy; then, relieved, smiles and takes Auntie Daisy by the hand.

'I want to tell you a secret.'

'Another one? All right, half a mo'. I'll just see the Macdonalds off, and then I'm at your service.'

When she has taken the Macdonalds out to the gate, and lingered for what seems to Sophia a long time chatting with Edna, who is her special chum, she stands waving to them for another long minute, then comes through the drawing-room and briskly across the lawn to where Sophia is impatiently waiting.

'Now, what's this all about?'

'Look out—that beastly Freddie will hear us.'

'Poor old Freddie, why have you got such a down on him? He's a dear fellow. All right, down we go to the cherry tree. Sharp's the word and quick's the movement.'

Once beneath the cherry tree, almost hidden from the casual glances of the very last guests who stood chatting in the long rays of the sinking sun, Sophia tells Auntie Daisy everything that she has overheard Grandpa and Freddie Hammond saying. Auntie Daisy whistles. Then she laughs.

'Why, you silly old chicken, that's nothing to make such a blooming fuss about. Grandpa was only asking Freddie which of us he wanted to marry.'

'Yes. I thought it must be something like that. But, Auntie Daisy—don't you mind that it isn't you?'

'Not a bit,' Auntie Daisy answers blithely. 'I'm glad he's made up his mind. Good lord, I'm not sweet on Freddie. He's like a sort of brother.'

Sophia has been seriously studying the pretty, dark-eyed

face crowned by puffs of fair hair, while vague thoughts (all Sophia's thoughts, except those concerned with words and sayings, are vague) about Loveday, and love, and Murray Walker, float across her mind.

'Are you sweet on anybody?' she asks suddenly.

'Good lord, no!' Auntie Daisy's laugh is so cheerful and frank that even Sophia, always quick to detect the serpent beneath the flowers of happiness, cannot hear in it any of the fatal hissing. 'I think all that sort of thing is soppy. So long as I've got you, and your mummy, and my daddy, I don't want any blooming old men. More fag than they're worth, I say.'

'Truly?' Sophia listens intently, eyes fixed on her aunt's smooth pink face; was that a hiss . . . ?

'See this finger wet——' Auntie Daisy licks, and holds up, a minute white member circled by a silver ring—'see this finger dry, cut my throat if I tell a lie.'

Sophia is satisfied. She looks silently upwards for a moment into the cherry tree, where dark transparent leaves and papery white flowers hang motionless, as if dreaming, in the golden light; then she smiles at Auntie Daisy and runs off.

Daisy lingers on the old wooden seat for a while. She will be Rita's bridesmaid; funny, having a bridesmaid older than the bride; she is twenty-five to Rita's twenty. There will be lots of shopping to do up West, and (oh lord!) *that* means days spent dragging up and down Oxford Street, between Aunt Nettie and Rita, on nothing more substantial than a cup of meat extract. Aunt Nettie will say, as usual, that she looks a sight in her bridesmaid's dress. But there will be the dress itself to look forward to, and she never more than half-believes Aunt Nettie's remarks, because, sometimes, the long mirror in her wardrobe tells her that she is every bit as pretty as Rita.

Her thoughts drift on; playing now about the last guests, who are being slowly ushered out through the drawing-room (where the Venetian blinds have been raised to admit the coolness of approaching evening) by Aunt Nettie, still calm and fresh as paint, and Grandpa, who can hardly wait to get the house to himself again. These very last guests of all are Mrs. Walker and Murray, and as she looks idly at the boy, Daisy thinks that he is going to be a very good-looking man, and then she thinks (as she always does, lately, whenever men enter her thoughts) that none of them will ever want to marry anyone so small and odd and shy as herself. No: so Daisybird will stay with her old daddy, and they will be cosy together.

The maids are crossing the lawn towards the house, carrying the tea urn between them, and a blackbird begins his evening song from the cherry tree. The air is warm, and golden, and still. Smoke is going up steadily from the big kitchen ranges, where the five course dinners are already being prepared. The last sets of tennis are being played to a finish, and the tranquil click of mallet against ball sounds across the shaved lawns; next door they are watering the grass, and the spray catches the fading sunlight in sparkling showers.

A carriage goes past along the road with the quick sound of rolling wheels and trotting hoofs. Gradually the sunlight sinks lower between the flowering branches of pear and apple, and the pink may takes on a deeper colour. Now the voices from tennis court and summerhouse come more quietly and at longer intervals. Someone has begun to play the piano in a drawing-room overlooking a garden filled with lilac, and the music of *Miss Hook of Holland* floats out into the air, into the hovering scent of flowers and fruit blossom. It is still very warm; the summer has come surprisingly early, as it always does, and to-morrow will surely

be a warm day too. The sunlight has not quite left the leaves, although it is almost seven o'clock, and the evening lingers as if reluctant to leave the happy earth; an ordinary evening in a suburb of London; but peaceful, so peaceful: calmly, radiantly, wonderfully peaceful . . .